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THE
PRINCIPLES
OF
DEISM

Truly represented, and set in
a clear Light.

IN
Two DIALOGUES
Between a
SCEPTICK and a *DEIST*.

The First concerning the
Christian Revelation:

The Second concerning
NATURAL RELIGION.

The FOURTH EDITION.

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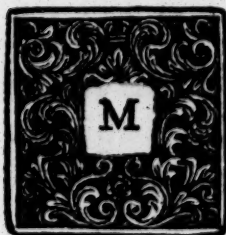


The PRINCIPLES of
D E I S M
Truly Represented, &c.
IN
Two DIALOGUES
Between a *Sceptick* and a *Deist*.



DIALOGUE I.
Concerning the Christian Revelation.

Sceptick.



Y old Friend! I am glad to
see you: You are the Man I
desired to meet.

Deist. Sir, I am your hum-
ble Servant. 'Tis a long
while since we saw one ano-
ther before; and therefore I am the better pleas'd
with my good Fortune now.

Scep. Solong, that tho' you have Civility enough
to know me again, I am somewhat doubtful whe-

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ther I may pretend to the same Friendship that was once between us.

Deist. You are true to your old Humour still I perceive, and are as very a *Sceptick* as ever: But if you could be assur'd of any thing, I would beg of you to look upon this one thing as certain, that I always preserve the same Regard for my Friends, tho' I have not always the same Opportunities of shewing it.

Scep. You and I were very well acquainted formerly: We have convers'd freely together in our time; and in those Days, when you was as much a *Sceptick* as I, our Agreement in believing nothing made us as fast Friends, as if we had sign'd the same Articles of Faith: But you have been a great Traveller (I am told) since I saw you, and have fixt your Opinions; and I could not tell what Alteration a Variety of Climates, and a different Way of thinking, might have made in you.

Deist. As to Travelling, I don't know what you mean: But, by the Strength of my own Reason, I have made a shift to clear up many Points to my self, which I could never be certain of before.

Scep. It is for this Reason that I am very desirous of renewing my Acquaintance with you, in hopes you may deliver me from the Uneasiness of doubting of every thing; which, I must own, begins to grow very troublesome: For I am oftentimes so distracted with contrary Arguments, and amus'd with various Colours and Resemblances; there are so many different Probabilities tugging my Mind several Ways at once, that I find it not only difficult, but painful to suspend, and keep the Balance even; and sometimes I am dispos'd to let go my hold, upon the next shock of Reason that comes against me; and then again I am afraid of being convinc'd, lest when one Point is granted, some other more ungrateful Truths should force
their

their Way after it. This, Sir, is the unhappy Situation of my Soul; and you are the Man that must ease me, who have, it seems, found the Way of curing your self. It is from you that I expect the Pleasure of believing and being fixt in such Opinions as will give me no trouble to keep.

Deist. I am obliged to you for entertaining such favourable Thoughts of me; but still I don't understand what you mean by my being a great Traveller. When I was a young Man I went into *France* and *Italy*, and made some stay at *Rome*; but since we were together last, I have never been out of *England*.

Scep. No Sir! Why, I thought you had been all the World over; that you had travelled far and near, not only by Land and Sea, but by Air and *Æther*; that you had visited all the planetary Systems, shot the Gulph, and past through all the Caverns of the Earth, down to the Central Fire; and in short, that you had ransack'd every Nook and Corner of the Universe.

Deist. You astonish me! I am at a loss to know what you intend by all this, and must wait till you are pleas'd to inform me.

Scep. To deal freely with you then; when you and I communicated our Thoughts last, it seem'd a doubtful thing to us both whether there was a *God* or no. And now I hear you are fully satisfy'd that there is none; which I thought 'twas impossible for you to be sure of, except you had taken the whole Tour of Nature, and had made a very diligent and careful Search too wherever you came.

Deist. Whoever has given you my Character of late, has deceiv'd you very much in his Accounts of me; for I am so far from believing that there is no *God*, that I am amaz'd to think how any Man can doubt of his Being. Every thing we meet
with

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with bears Witness of him: All the Creatures have the Marks and Impressions of their Author upon them; and there is not a Stone, a Plant, or an Insect, but will lead you up to the Fountain of all Being and Life: So that a Man should not travel through the World, but rather get quite out of it into some vast empty Space, far from all manner of Objects, if he would divest himself of the Notion of a Deity; and even there he could not deny the Existence of a God, without forgetting his own.

Scep. How's this! What positive on the other side! This is the most wonderful Change I ever heard of. From doubting of a God to denying him is an easy Step; but for a *Sceptick* to turn Bigot is very unnatural, and out of all Observation. For my part, I am just where you left me still; I neither assent nor deny. There are, I confess, many things which might induce a Man to imagine that there was some first Being which gave Birth to all other Beings. And 'tis hard to give an Account how the World should be as it is, except there had been some Wisdom and Contrivance employ'd in the Disposition of it. But then again, there are several Appearances which I can't reconcile to the common Notions Men have of God; and therefore I cannot speak with that Assurance of these Matters which you do: However, I will not enter upon this Dispute with you at present; because I find you so determined your self, and so secured by Numbers of your side; but I will beg to be informed what other Principles you have got which you embrace with the same Confidence; because it looks probable enough to me, that if there be any such thing as Certainty to be had in one Point, there is as much Reason to expect it in others.

Deist. I am not ashamed of my Principles or Opinions of any kind; but what sort of Principles are they which you desire to know? Such as concern Religion, or——

Scep. O, by all means, your religious Principles, as you call them: For if one thing be more necessary to be known than another, it must be *Religion*: And if I could come to a Certainty in that matter, I should very easily bring my self to Reason about every thing else, as the rest of the World does.

Deist. So far you argue very justly; and I hope, before our Conversation ends, to give you such a rational Account of Religion, as you will not be afraid to receive.

Scep. There you say somewhat: For between our selves, I am free to acknowledge, that all my Scruples and Distrusts concerning a God, did really proceed from a terrible Train of Consequences, which I foresaw would croud in upon me, if I once granted this Point; such as would lay great Restraints upon me, damp all my Pleasures, and put me under a Necessity of altering the whole Course of my Life; which might prove a very troublesome Business to do.

Deist. I can't tell what strange Apprehensions you may have of God, which make you unwilling to own him: But I take him to be an easy merciful Being, that loves his Creatures, and requires no other Service from them than what is agreeable to their *Nature* and *Inclinations*.

Scep. That's very kind indeed, if it be as you say: But so far as I am a Judge of this matter, there are a great many things in Religion that won't at all agree with my Constitution; nor with yours neither, unless you are mightily chang'd from what you was: And I don't hear but as to the moral
Part

part of your Character, you are the same Man, both *Believer* and *Infidel*.

Deist. Pray whence have you these terrible Notions of Religion? I hope you don't give heed to *Priests* and *Fanaticks*, who take a malicious Pleasure in tying up their Brethren to hard Meat, while they let loose their own Appetites to every thing that they like; and claim it as their peculiar Privilege, to indulge themselves.

Scep. No Sir; I don't regard what this or that particular Retailer of Religious Doctrines is pleas'd to deliver; nor what is summ'd up together as the Faith of this or that Party: But in those very Books which all the several Sects of *Religionists* in this part of the World acknowledge and submit to as of undeniable Authority; There it is that I find a great many things, which, with the softest Interpretation I can put upon them, will never be brought to suit with my inclinations and ways of living. I can't tell what strange Art the *Jesuits* have got of making up pretty convenient Setts of Morals, fit for every Man's use, and adjusted to the Size of every Man's Conscience; but were I to study the Scriptures never so long, I should hardly be able, by all the bending and plying I could use, to make them serve all my purposes.

Deist. What do you believe *the Scriptures* then?

Scep. No: But I take it for granted, you do.

Deist. What reason have I given you to suspect me of so much Credulity? Because I agree with all the Nations and Ages, of the World, in the acknowledgment of a God, must I believe every pretender to Messages and Commissions from Heaven? The voice of Nature is plain and easy to be understood, but that which they call the *Word of God* is past my comprehension.

Scep. I beg your Pardon for making any addition
to

to your *Creed*; but hearing you talk of God and Religion, I concluded presently that you had been a *Christian*; because all that I meet with in these Parts of the World (however they differ in their Notions about Christianity) go under that Name, excepting some few *Jews* that live among us, and I presume you are no Profelyte to them.

Deist. No indeed: I am no *Jew*, neither am I a *Christian*: The Character I bear is that of *Deist*; and I answer to no other Name. I am fully persuaded that there is a God; and I have as worthy and as honourable Notions of him as any *Jew* or *Christian* of them all; but I know of no Books that were written by him; and I don't believe a Tittle either of the *Old Testament* or the *New*.

Scep. And are you as sure that these Books are false, as you are that there is a God?

Deist. Yes; why not?

Scep. This is stranger than all the rest: I could not easily have imagin'd, that an old well-beaten *Sceptick* would prove a sturdy Asserter of God and Religion; but that a Man should come so far and yet go no farther, this is what I do not readily understand.

Deist. I wonder at that; for tho' you are still in the state of *Scepticism*, so as not to be positive either in Asserting or Denying any thing, yet you must needs own that some things appear clearer, and more probable to you than others; and particularly, that the Natural proofs, of the Being of God, seem much brighter and stronger, and much more irresistible than those that are brought for the truth of the *Christian Religion*.

Scep. Quite contrary, I do assure you, if I may be allow'd to use such a confident Word.

Deist. It can never be; you must say this (as your manner is) in pure Contradiction, only to make me abate of my Confidence, and to shew me

how far I am from certainty when I think I have fastest hold of it.

Scep. No indeed; I am very serious and in Earnest, when I tell you, that I could be much easier convinc'd of the truth of the whole Christian Religion together, than I could be brought to believe a God by any Arguments that a *Deist* could urge for it.

Deist. You have surpriz'd me now as much as I did you before: pray favour me with an account of the Grounds you proceed upon.

Scep. That I shall very willingly; for I am very ready to hear or impart any thing, tho' I am not so free to believe. You know very well that we *Modern Scepticks* do not keep our Souls at such an exact poise as our Fore-Fathers did: And, as to my self in particular, I am so far inclin'd to the *Epicurean* Sect, as to have a greater Opinion of my *Senses* than my *Reason*.

Deist. This is strange Doctrine; but pray what use do you make of it?

Scep. That you shall see presently: but first let me ask you one Question; Do you believe the World to have been *Eternal*? Or is it your Opinion that it was created in Time?

Deist. I hold that the World was made by God, not created out of Nothing (as the *Divines* speak) but moulded into Form, and the Springs of Motion set a going. But why do you ask this?

Scep. Only to illustrate the Matter I am upon to you. Supposing then that you had been the first thing that was form'd upon a *Chaos*, such as you take this Earth once to have been; and while you was groping up and down in the Dark, up to the Knees in Mud, you had heard a Voice say, *Let there be Light*, and immediately *there was Light*; and that afterwards, upon another like Command, you had found the Water running from under your Feet,

Feet, and hastening from all the parts about you into Channels just then open'd to receive 'em; and being thus set upon dry Ground, you had look'd up and seen the Sun, Moon, and Stars shoot forth, and take their Places in a Firmament newly made for them; and after this, the Trees and Fowls and Beasts had all sprung out of the Ground and the Water, in your sight, at the same word of Command: would not this wonderful Scene, display'd and acted in this manner in your presence, have given you a fuller and more satisfactory Conviction of God's forming the World, than what you have now by all the Inferences drawn from the present Frame and Constitution of Things?

Deist. I can't say but it would: But this is All an imaginary Scene, an extravagant Supposition, beyond any thing that even *Revelation* pretends to.

Scep. Pray mistake me not; I am far from asserting any such thing as a *Creation*, or *Formation* of the World at all: But I only draw this Image, to shew you how far *sensible* Knowledge is to be preferr'd to that which is call'd *Rational*; which being granted, it must be allow'd me that I had good Reason to say, that the Proofs brought for the Christian Religion have a greater appearance of Truth in them, than any Arguments which can be produc'd for the Being of a God, by one who denies that God ever concern'd himself with the World since he made it.

Deist. I don't understand that Consequence at all.

Scep. No! Let us suppose then once more, that you had been present at all those wonderful Facts which are said to have been done by *Christ* and his Apostles in the Scriptures, and had had some share in them your self, as being healed or raised from the Dead, or the like; That you had seen *Christ* crucify'd, and conversed with him after he

was risen from the Grave, and had beheld him ascending up from you into Heaven; That you had known the Apostles, their Education and way of Life, and had heard them speak such Languages as they never learn'd; And that afterwards you had observ'd what a mighty Progress the Gospel made in a short time, notwithstanding all the Power and Zeal that were employ'd to suppress it: Had you your self been a Witness of all this, should you not have been better satisfy'd that these things were done by the Hand of God, than you are now, that the whole World was some time or other form'd by him when you was not present to see the ordering of it?

Deist. Still you go on upon *ocular Testimony*, which is immediate and irresistible, and seems to convince more, because it's quicker and pleases better, than *rational Demonstration*; tho' according to the Opinion of the best Philosophers, the latter is, in its own Nature, more proper to convince. But this is nothing to our purpose, for you and I were born long after these things were pretended to be done, and consequently all kind of proof from Sense is impossible.

Scep. I am not going about to prove that you or I ever saw any of these things; but if you will suffer me to give you my Notions with the same freedom that you have communicated yours, I must tell you in the next place, that, having a good opinion of my own Senses, I am apt to have a suitable regard to those of other Men; so that I believe what they tell me they saw and heard, much sooner than what they pretend to prove to me by rational Arguments, tho' they use never such strong words, and call every thing they say *Demonstration*.

Deist. The generality of the World judge quite otherwise.

Scep.

Scep. I know they do, and therefore they cry up *Mathematicks* as the most certain piece of Knowledge we are capable of; But I can't be of their Mind: For there are so many *Postulata*, *Axioms*, *Definitions*, *Propositions*, and *Corollaries*, to be understood, before one can come at any of those demonstrated Truths which they boast of, that I am quite tir'd before I come thither, or else drop some of the Links, and so lose the Connexion.

Deist. But is not this an easier, and surer way of finding out Truth, and Examining Evidence?

Scep. In some cases perhaps it may: But should I go upon the *Change*, and there talk with several Merchants and others, that told me they had been at *Cadiz*; that some of them had liv'd there, others traded thither, and others had Correspondence with some of the Inhabitants, I should be better persuaded that there was such a Town in *Spain*, than ever I could be that the three *Angles* of every *Triangle* are equal to two Right.

Deist. Whither does all this tend?

Scep. The use I make of it is this; That the truth of the *Christian Religion* depending upon plain obvious sensible Facts, which every Man was a capable Judge of at the time they are said to be done, 'tis very hard to conceive how Mankind should be so far imposed upon in Matters of this Nature, as to agree in the belief of so many strange Facts, perform'd in such a publick manner, in so many Places, for a whole Age together, before so many Witnesses, of different Characters, and Interests, if none of them all were true?

Deist. Is this all you have to say for the Credibility of the *Christian Religion*? This is far from the Case still.

Scep. Take me right, I beseech you: I am not an Advocate for the Christians, never fear that: I am only putting my Objections as strong as I
can

can, that I may receive the fuller Answer to them from you that have studied the Point, and are therefore, I trust, very able to explain this odd Event: For that a great Part of the World do now believe all those things that are written in the Scriptures to be true, I suppose you allow.

Deist. Yes, yes; There's no doubt of that, but abundance do believe these things; and 'tis very easy to account for the Delusion.

Scep. As how I pray?

Deist. Why, won't Children believe any thing that their Parents teach them when they are young? The most rational Men that ever liv'd have been so hamper'd and entangled by the Prejudices of *Education*, that very few of them have been able to shake off any Opinions which they took in early, tho' never so absurd and ridiculous. Are not the *Turks* as zealous for the *Alcoran*, as the *Christians* are for the *Bible*, and all this owing purely to a different Education? The Remark is too obvious to be dwelt upon.

Scep. It must be confess'd, that we are very inclinable to hold fast what was first deliver'd to us. The Brains of young People are tender, and receive deep Impressions; which, if they continue, are not easily effac'd again. But pray be pleas'd to inform me what your Thoughts are concerning the *Antiquity* of the *Christian Religion*: Do you look upon the first Men that were made by God to have been *Christians*?

Deist. The first Men *Christians*! What a wild Notion is that? Does not every Body know the true Age of Christianity? This is allow'd by the greatest Sticklers for it, to have been of late Original; their own Account of it reaches no higher than *Tiberius* the Roman Emperor.

Scep. Very well: And do you agree in that Point

Point with the Christians, that their Religion was then first publish'd to the World?

Deist. Yes; why not?

Scep. And do you lay the first Scene of it where they do, at *Jerusalem*?

Deist. It could come from no other Place; that's plain from the whole Model of the Invention.

Scep. Do you allow also that it got footing immediately, and prevail'd among the *Jews* at *Jerusalem* and other Towns of that Country; and that afterwards it spread from thence to *Rome*, *Athens*, and divers other Parts of the World? And do you think that the Propagation of the Gospel was so early and so wide as is commonly related?

Deist. There's no Unlikelihood in all this; for *Superstition* is very infectious; and the Minds of Men are strangely disposed to receive the taint.

Scep. But pray Sir, were not all those that first embrac'd Christianity deeply engaged in another sort of *Religion* or *Superstition* before? Were not the *Jews* bred up in a profound Veneration of *Moses*? Were they not very tenacious of the Statutes and Ordinances enjoined by him, and press'd upon them by their Fathers with strict Injunctions of Care? Were not the *Romans* likewise, and *Athenians*, and all the other People that turned Christians, extremely prejudiced by the Guides and Instructors of their Youth in favour of the several Gods and Customs of their different Countries? And how then could Christianity owe its Success to Education?

Deist. How now old *Socrates*! Is this your way to ensnare a Man with a train of captious round-about Questions? I shall take care how I answer so many again without knowing the drift of them. The Influence of Education is certainly very great, tho' I don't think it so great neither but the desire of *Novelty* will sometimes overbear it; and this I

take

take to be the present Case. Christianity was a very new, and a very surprizing Doctrine, and was usher'd in with wonderful high Pretences; and this made the World run a madding after it.

Scep. Well then; since you are driven from your former Post, let's examine the strength of this. Novelty indeed has strange Charms in it, and new Opinions will sometimes get the better of old ones, tho' never so well riveted; especially if they fall in better with the prevailing Inclinations of our Nature; if they sooth our Passions, and let loose our Desires; or if they are obtruded upon us by force, and are back'd with a formidable attendance of Crosses, and Gibbets, and Faggots. If the Garison be bribed within the Walls, or the Cannon play furiously upon them from without, 'tis no great wonder to have them surrender the Town tho' they lov'd the Place never so well, or had been all bred and born there.

Deist. I see what you are aiming at. Because the Doctrines of Christianity are not very palatable in themselves, nor were ramm'd down People's Throats, therefore you can't imagine how so many Persons should be persuaded to swallow them of their own accord, unless they had good reason to believe, that there was a more than ordinary Virtue in them. And this I confess, has puzzled me the most of any thing; because I find no manner of inclination in my self to like what is there prescribed: But there are some Men of such an unaccountable Make, that they will believe any thing that's new, tho' never so absurd and inconsistent: And when they are heated into a strong Belief of their Opinions, they'll suffer any thing in the World rather than part with them. Some Instances of this kind we meet with in every Age and every Country; but I must needs own that
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the Humour never was so general as it was at that time when Christianity first appear'd.

Scep. What should be the Reason of such an unusual turn of Spirit in the Men of that Age.

Deist. It was some *critical Juncture*, some *peculiar Disposition of the Heavens*, or some such kind of *Universal Cause* as breeds Plagues, raises Wars, or the like, that dispos'd Men at that time to fall into such a strange, improper, troublesome Delusion.

Scep. It may be so; we do not fully understand all the turnings and windings of Nature: Perhaps some *extraordinary Agitation of the Anima Mundi* might occasion a general Disturbance in Men's Brains, after the same manner that Wind in the Body of the Earth makes a general Earthquake. And therefore I am not so apt to wonder at any strange Opinions or Doctrines that prevail in the World: Especially considering how uncertain and capricious a thing Reason is. But that which sticks most with me, is, how such and such Facts came to be so generally believed: How the Senses of Mankind should be so grossly deceiv'd in Matters, within their proper Cognizance. In Points of Speculation indeed a Man may bring himself to believe what he will, or he may have Art enough to persuade another to believe what he has a mind he should: But 'tis in no Man's Power to persuade himself that he saw what he did not see; nor to make others believe that they saw and heard what they never saw nor heard: If you have never such a Power over the Spirit of another, when you come to tell him that such a thing was done in his sight which was not done at all, he will immediately leave you, withdraw his Homage, and trust his own Senses before the most admir'd Doctor in the World.

Deist. It is indeed very hard to impose upon
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Men's Senses in plain Cases, which they have been much used to. But Imagination is so near a-kin to Sense, that sometimes when that is strongly heated by some powerful Delusion, the Deceit may pass into the Senses, and a Man may be brought to think he *sees* what he only *imagines*.

Scep. This will never help you in the present Case, had the *first Christians* been all as fanciful Men as you are willing to represent them: And to prove that it will not, give me leave to tell you a Story that happen'd not long ago.

There was in my Remembrance a Country Parson, who was as good a Scholar as any of the *Christian Apostles*, not excepting *Paul* himself; and if he was not altogether such a Saint, yet he was a very honest good Man; all his Neighbours gave him that Character; and those that understood preaching, said, he did it very well; but for all this, the poor Man in his latter Days was a little craz'd, and nothing would serve his turn, but he must set up a new Sect, or rather act over part of the Christian Scene again: Several strange Notions he had, and abundance of Disciples, who believed so thoroughly every thing he told them, that, by his Direction, they left their several Trades and Occupations, and brought all their Goods together to one Place, and liv'd in common; and so they intended to do till the *end of all things*, which upon his word they were fully persuaded was near at hand: And indeed there is nothing in Nature to be conceived so absurd, which they would not have believed when he assured them of it. Now, it happen'd that when they were all together, in full expectation of some strange Revolution, the Parson fell sick; and finding himself like to die, he call'd his People to him, and bid them not be discouraged at his leaving them; for within three Days he would rise again; which they as firmly believed as they did

did any of his other Doctrines; and accordingly they attended thereabouts to see the Event, taking their turns to watch Day and Night, that they might be ready to meet him. Their Imaginations were work'd up to as high a Pitch as 'twas possible; but all would not do. He never rose again (as you may imagine) and they were not able to bring themselves to fancy, that they saw and convers'd with him; and so they departed home not a little confounded, and betook themselves to their former way of living; and the Sect hath never been heard of since.

Deist. This was a mad Fellow indeed.

Scep. Ay, you may be sure of it, or else he had never pretended to such wonderful Facts without being able to perform them. And from hence it is easy to conclude, that the Authors of all other Sects, tho' never so wild, have not been so mad as they are commonly thought to be; because they have placed all their Religion in Words and Notions that would bear turning, and twisting, and colouring; so that every Man being at liberty to shape them to his own Understanding, 'tis difficult to root them out: Or if they have pretended to any extraordinary Facts, these have been only *secret Whispers*, and *Voices*, and *Appearances*, which no body having heard or seen but themselves, they could not be discovered to be false by others.

Deist. So far I grant the first Publishers of the *Christian Religion* have taken a quite different method from other Broachers of new Doctrine; that they have pretended to prove it by abundance of uncommon Facts: But how is it possible that such a strange Story as that which is told about *Christ* and his Apostles, should be true? Does it not appear at first sight to be all Invention? It is indeed a wonder how any sensible Men came to believe it formerly: But would it not be a greater wonder,

if Men should continue to believe it to the end of the World?

Scep. If you have no better ground for denying it than this, you might as well profess your self *Sceptick* still: For do not the Christians argue just thus, that they wonder how any Man can reject what has so many Characters of Truth to recommend it? Were not, say they, the *Facts* of such kinds, and done in such a manner as could not be counterfeited? Were not the Persons that did them such plain, honest, sincere Men, as could not deceive? And are not the Accounts which are given of these things delivered in such a simple unaffected Style, as takes off all Suspicion of Forgery? With many the like specious Reasonings. Such Arguments as these satisfy every Man just as he was affected and disposed to believe before. But if you would pretend to establish your Point, so as to convince Men that think differently from you, you must produce some real Testimonies and Proofs from Antiquity, that this Scene was all laid upon a false Foundation: For the Christians are certainly in Possession; they have set forth their Title, and call'd all the old Men that are extant in Books, both Friends and Enemies, to witness for them: Pray let's hear then what you have to alledge to invalidate the Evidence they have brought.

Deist. The whole Story consists of such improbable Accounts, that it easily confutes itself.

Scep. I'll hear you as to this Plea by and by: But at present I desire to know what Witnesses you will call to prove the Forgery. There were a great many *Jews*, and a great many *Heathens* that rejected this Religion at first; surely they had some reason to give, why they did so; especially the *Rulers* and *Philosophers*, and the *Wise Men* among them. Besides, there were many of those that embrac'd this Religion at first, who revolted afterwards; and these

these, methinks, should tell Tales, if there had been any foul Play. Can you produce any of them for Evidence in your Cause?

Deist. There were, no doubt, such Authors as gave a true Account of this Imposture, and the whole Management of it; but they are all lost.

Scep. All lost! Not a fragment of them left! There are abundance of ancient Books still remaining: Is there no mention in any of them of these other Books that you say are lost? nor any Account given how they came to be lost?

Deist. There are names of several Books that are now missing, preserv'd, which, by their Titles and the Names of their Authors, we guess were written upon this Subject; but the Number and the Power of the Christians increasing, to be sure they took care to suppress all these Books that made against them.

Scep. 'Tis hard to imagine why they should be so fond of an unprofitable Scheme of Falshood, as to destroy all the Means of being undeceiv'd. But methinks when the *Believers* and *Unbelievers* were every where mix'd together, there must have been great clashing between them, and consequently Books written for and against either Side. Are none of these Controversial Writings preserv'd? They would afford us some Light if they were.

Deist. Yes, there are some *Apologies* of Christians to Heathen Emperors, and Governors of Provinces, in Answer to many things charged upon them and their Religion: There's a Treatise of *Origen* against *Celsus*: There are some Remains of *Hierocles* and *Porphyry*; and the Works of *Lucian* and *Julian*, &c. are still Extant; all which were profest Enemies to the Christians: But these are such as the Christians were pleased to give us; and you must needs think that they would order the
matter

matter so, that nothing should be left in them to do them any hurt.

Scep. What, is there no mention in any of these ancient Books, written for and against the Christian Religion, that the *Facts* alledg'd by the Christians were False?

Deist. No, not as we now have them.

Scep. What sort of Objections then do the Adversaries of Christianity make to it, if they allow the *Facts* upon which it is built?

Deist. Why, they say, some of them, that *Christ* and his Apostles did their Wonders by the help of the *Devil*: And others of them pretend, that as great things had been done by Men of different Religions (particularly by *Vespasian*, *Apollonius Tyanus*, &c.) as ever *Christ* and his Apostles did.

Scep. And the Christians quote these Objections fairly, do they?

Deist. Yes, and are very full in their Answers to them.

Scep. And if any Body had urg'd, that the *Facts* upon which they built their Religion were False, why should not they have mention'd these Objections too as well as they did the other?

Deist. Because they thought the former would not hurt their Cause, and the latter would. They knew very well where the pinch of the Dispute lay, and so they took care to ward off that Blow.

Scep. Then it must be supposed, that none of these first Christians, at least none of the Writers, did really believe their Religion to be true, but only Profess'd to believe what they knew in their Hearts to be a Cheat?

Deist. Why so?

Scep. The Reason is plain; because Persons that are thoroughly perswaded of a thing, are never afraid of what can be said against it; especially such as
are

are engag'd in Controversy; it being commonly, and justly observ'd, that Answerers always muster up as many Objections, and make them all as formidable as they can; either to magnify the goodness of their Cause, or the strength of their own Reason.

Deist. Ay; but this was so tender a Point, that none of them durst touch upon it.

Scep. O Sir, you are not acquainted with the utmost Extent of Learned Vanity. Was there no such thing as a *Critick* living in the World before every scrap and fragment of those Writings you talk of, was lost? If there had, I am sure he would have done his best to find it out, to restore the Text. and to put large Comments upon it, whatever Mischief had happen'd to Religion by it. But it seems you have no Witnesses to produce of any kind. Let us proceed then upon another foot, and let us hear what you have to say to the Story's confuting itself: For there I perceive you think your self strongest in your Proof.

Deist. This is so plain a Case, that, if any one will but lay by the Prejudices of Education, and impartially read over the Christian Story, he must needs judge it impossible to be true.

Scep. That's fairly and lustily asserted; and if it were but half so well proved, it would supply the want of any other Evidence, and convince the most zealous Christian breathing. But I being none of those that require such strong Applications to my Understanding, I shall not expect so much as this from you: I won't put you to the trouble of shewing the Story to be impossible, or so much as improbable; if I were but satisfy'd of the bare Possibility of its being false, I should be ready enough to allow it to be so.

Deist. That's the easiest thing in the World to prove.

Scep.

Scep. I am glad of it with all my Heart. But when you go about to satisfy me in this Point, you must remember my Infirmary, that I am no Friend to bare Reasoning and Deduction: I must have the Matter brought down to my Senses, or I shall never apprehend it.

Deist. How can that be? You must consider the Characters of Truth; compare the Degrees of Probability, and know what is Possible and Impossible; and then summing up the whole Proof to your self, you must judge of the Validity of it.

Scep. This Method will never do with me, unless you apply to my Senses all the while by apt Images and Resemblances; and therefore I'll tell you how you shall proceed with me.

Deist. How, I pray?

Scep. Why, we will suppose the whole *Christian Scene* to be transacted in our Times, and if upon the whole representation I judge we might be imposed upon *now*, in the same manner that you say the *first Christians* were, I will conclude, that they were really so deceiv'd, without any positive Evidence of the Thing; and I think that's fair enough.

Deist. Very fair: I don't doubt, but by such a representation as this, you will see how the thing was carry'd on formerly.

Scep. To begin then: You must get me a Man of mean Parentage here in *England*, who must pretend to come down from Heaven; to be sent by God to teach us a new Religion; and to work abundance of Miracles, in order to make it believ'd: for which Pretences being put to Death, he must afterwards take upon him to rise again; to be seen by many of those who had professed themselves his Disciples while he lived; to converse freely with them for Forty Days; and then to ascend up into Heaven in their sight. Besides this Man, you must procure twelve more, who shall pretend to believe

believe every thing that he said and did; and to work the like Miracles, by virtue of a Commission from him, for the proof and confirmation of the same Doctrine: And about the same time there must arise Seventy more; and after them abundance, without Number, who shall pretend to the same Commission, and to the same Works. All which Pretences shall have that Credit and Influence as to dispose the generality of the People in this Kingdom, and all the Countries of *Europe*, to embrace this new Religion: And an Account being given of the publication and progress of this Religion, in such a manner as is before-mention'd, by some of the first Publishers, the Books which contain this Account, shall be receiv'd not only as True and Authentick, but as written by the immediate assistance and direction of God. If you can persuade me that 'tis possible to order Matters so, that in an hundred Years time all this may be brought about, and can give me such a Specimen of the Design in the compass of three Years, as the *Christians* affirm was wrought by *Christ* in the same time, then will I freely allow all that Religion to be False, without any farther Examination.

Deist. This is a long tedious Business to represent in All the number, and variety of Circumstances necessary to compleat the Parallel.

Scep. Be it never so long, every Circumstance must come in to determine the Truth or Falshood of the whole. But to spare your pains, and to shew you how willing I am to be satisfy'd, I'll cut you out shorter Work, and you shall only represent to me the *twelve Apostles* spreading a new Religion through the World, such as the *Christian* is. And who shall we have to act this Part?

Deist. 'Tis easie to find twelve Men that may impose upon the World in the same manner as they did.

Scep. What sort of Men shall they be? Do you think you could pick up a Dozen Fishermen that had Sagacity enough to propagate such a Story as that of *Christ*, if it were invented for them, and they were well instructed in it?

Deist. If they pretended to be *Fishermen*, or Men of any other mean Occupations, it were enough; for who knows whether the Apostles were such or no? We have only their own Words for it.

Scep. What think you then, if they were *Jesuits* all? They are the Cunning'st Fellows that I know in the World; and 'tis usual with them to disguise themselves by following mean Trades.

Deist. They would do it to a Hair, if they were but at liberty to set up a new Religion; but they are under such subjection to the *Romish* See——

Scep. 'Tis no matter for that. Why, the Apostles were all zealous *Jews*, and were bred up to have as good an Opinion of *Moses*, as the *Jesuits* have of the *Pope*.

Deist. That's very true: And to be sure there are *Jesuits* to be found, that for a good Cause, and to set themselves up above the *Pope*, might be prevail'd upon to break from him.

Scep. But you must take care that these *Jesuits* be all right honest Men, plain, simple, and sincere; we must have no tricking nor equivocating, nor——

Deist. What need they be all *Jesuits*? May not some of them be *Benedictines*, or Men of other Orders?

Scep. O, by all means; pick and cull your Men where you please, only remember that they must keep to the Character they take upon them.

Deist. But now I think on't, they may be *Jesuits* after all; for what occasion is there for their being Honest and Sincere? That's contrary to the Supposition we are upon: If they appear to be so 'tis sufficient.

Scep.

Scep. 'Tis enough, if they can but carry it off handsomly without any Discovery; but they must never be caught without their Mask on; all their Senses and Passions must be still and quiet, so as never to throw off the Disguise of Virtue.

Deist. This is hard Fare indeed; but we must infuse a great deal of the Tincture of Vain-glory into them, and keep up their Spirits with the sovereign Pleasure of being Authors of a new Sect.

Scep. Then you must give them all strict Instructions never to discover who set them on work, whatever they are promis'd or threaten'd.

Deist. I'll engage for their Secrecy.

Scep. But how will they do to work *Miracles*?

Deist. O, never fear them for that; they are the best Artists in the World in imposing upon Mankind in such Matters; the Miracles done by Men of their Stamp, do already fill whole Volumes.

Scep. But they must do otherguess Miracles, now, than any that are recorded in their *Legends*. The sweating and bleeding of Images, and such like Tricks, won't pass upon us for Miracles; Pail-fulls of Virgins Milk, and Cart-loads of Crosse will signifie nothing. They must upon the spot multiply a few Loaves, and feed five Thousand People with them: They must cure all manner of Diseases; raise the Dead; and speak all Languages, *Welch* not excepted. Then they must not pretend to do such things in their own Churches and Cloysters, and particular Places contriv'd for Deceit, but they must come out into the publick Market-places, and open Fields, and do all their Signs and Wonders in the presence of Multitudes.

Deist. They have Patterns of great Cures, and other Miracles of the like kind, upon Record already; and those done publickly too in the midst of great Cities, and before numbers of Witnesses.

Scep. But in what part of the World were they
D 2 done?

done? In *Spain* and *Italy*; in bigotted Countries; and before People that believed already every thing that these Miracles could induce them to believe. Your Apostles must come over into *England* and *Holland* with their Miracles; they must manifest their Power in *London* and *Amsterdam*, by feeding and curing living Hereticks, and raising dead ones; and by making the most stubborn Protestants quit their former Faith, to embrace the new Doctrine proposed to them.

Deist. But you have such bloody Laws here in *England*, that it will not be safe for *Jesuits* to venture themselves among you upon such a Design; let them be never so well qualify'd to execute it.

Scep. That's very true; but they must prepare for Opposition and ill Treatment wherever they come. Scourging, Bonds, and Imprisonment will be the only Rewards they are to expect for all their Pains: And they must all at last be *Martyrs* one way or other; by Hanging, Stoning, Sawing asunder, or the like; not one of them must die a Natural Death.

Deist. This is harder and harder: What get nothing all their Lives, and die miserably at last for the maintenance of a Lye! But great is the Power of Fame, and sweet is the Fore-tast of Glory after Death! I don't know but this may do. Are there not (think you) twelve *Curtius's* or *Codrus's* to be found in the World?

Scep. Ay, but Twelve won't do your Business, if there were so many mad Heroes to be met with all at one time.

Deist. Why, did not you say that twelve would do?

Scep. Yes at first; but these Twelve must manage it so, that a great many more shall tread in their Steps afterwards, run thro' the same Scenes of Life, live as poorly, and die as miserably as they did; and all for the Confirmation of what every

very one of them must needs know to be false. Then there must arise up Thousands, and Thousands, who shall really believe every thing so attested, to be true; and for three hundred Years together there shall be *Martyrs* and *Confessors* in abundance, and no body get any thing all this while by their new Religion.

Deist. But their Successors shall make amends for all their Poverty and Sufferings.

Scep. That may be, if the Design can be spun out to such a length. But do you think it a possible thing to contrive such a Race of Men, as shall venture upon such a vast ridiculous Project as this, and be so long a carrying it on, for the benefit of a company of cheating luxurious Varlets that may happen to come after them.

Deist. I find this is a long troublesome Business to prove to another, tho' it seems very plain to me. For my part, I must confess, I never enter'd so nicely into the detail of the Matter; the whole account has an Air of Imposture in it; and I trust to my own Sagacity that I am in the right: For I judge of Religions as I do of Meats, that which is not agreeable to my Gust, I conclude to be false, without examining any farther into it.

Scep. 'Tis very well that I have brought you to this Confession: I have some hopes now of your returning to *Scepticism* again; for if you are weary of defending your new Ground already, when so small a part of the Force that might be brought against you is come up, you must needs find it much easier to maintain your self in your old Post.

Deist. I had never left it if it had been tenable: But when a Man is press'd, and push'd hard on every side, what must he do? When a Matter is prov'd fairly to me in the usual Method of reasoning, would you have me say to the Person that argues with me: Well, Sir, notwithstanding all the plausible

plausible Reasons you have urged, it may be you may be in the wrong still; this is not strict Demonstration; things that had an appearance of Truth and Probability of their side at first, have afterwards proved to be false, &c. Why I am hooted at and despis'd when I talk thus; and whoever disputes with me, concludes that he has carry'd his Point.

Scep. Well, but for all that, if I may advise you, never be positive; never pretend to Schemes and Hypotheses; never go about to prove that the Christian Religion is false; for 'tis ten to one but you are baffled in this Attempt, by Men that have studied the Subject more than you, and have got greater Skill in managing what they call their Reason, or the Art of talking upon any thing; and then if you should be foiled, you have no retreat left, but to turn Christian.

Deist. How Sir! not defend my own Opinions, nor prove those that I have rejected to be false! This is no way agreeable to the Dictates of right Reason.

Scep. Fine Words! But I say still, be not positive; fix no Opinions; erect no Schemes; take warning by your Predecessors, *Infidels* of eminent Name and celebrated Memory. What's become of *Epicurus's* famous *System of Atoms*? All out of Doors and despised. *Pomponatius's* *Peripatetick* Stuff no Body can bear reading: *Spinoza* no Body can understand; and my Friend *H bbs*, whom I once admir'd has been so mau'd by that Toad *Eachard*, that I protest I despise him, and take him to be a solemn empty Trifler. And if *Alphonsus* was (as they say) disposed to turn Atheist by considering the Absurdities of the *Ptolemaick System*, how fillily must he have look'd now, when Sir. *Isaac Newton's* Hypothesis has clear'd up all his Difficulties. Nay, what a ridiculous Figure would all the ancient *Atheists* and

Deists

Deists make, were they now alive, when they saw all the Notions and Principles they formerly depended on, utterly confounded?

Deist. These were Men of great Name indeed; but new Improvements in Philosophy since their time have proved them mistaken in what they advanc'd for our Cause; tho' the Ground-work of all their Reasoning was true. But we have had other Writers of late, who have carried the Point farther than they did, and whose Principles are better supported. I don't doubt but you have read some of our modern Books where Matters are handled freely.

Scep. I have indeed: But to give you my Judgment as freely; they are written with more Impudence and less Sense than the Books of any dogmatical Infidels of old.

Deist. I am surpriz'd to hear such a Character of them from you.

Scep. What would you have me believe that *there's no Devil*, merely upon *Irish Evidence*? Would you have the *Ladies* take all their *Natural Religion* from an *Italian Pedagogue*? Is it reasonable, do you think that your admired Mathematicians should quit all their Demonstrations, and believe a Fellow upon his Word, that every Particle of Matter is always actually and necessarily in Motion; and that by virtue of new Glasses he has got, he can look into a Mill-stone, and see all the Particles of it in constant Agitation, as plainly as you may see the Blood move in a Fish's Tail? Would you have me esteem a Man that I know blasphemes for Bread? Or shall a Blockhead whom no Body trusts in his own Profession, command my Faith, when he new models the World, and invents new Schemes of Government?

Deist. One would think you were some bigotted *Christian* by your Zeal: For without an inveterate Prejudice

Prejudice no Body could speak so contemptuously of Men that have asserted the Liberty of Mankind, and endeavoured to deliver them from the heavy Yoke of Superstition.

Scep. Why, do you take all these free Writers, as you call them, to be *Deists*?

Deist. Take them to be so; I know it: I have talk'd with them all; we have convers'd intimately together, and they have unbosom'd their Souls to me.

Scep. I could not find that out by their Writings. *Epicurus* indeed, and *Lucretius*, and all of that Sect, were profest *Deists*; and to a higher degree than you pretend to; for they believed but just enough of a God not to bear the Name of *Atheist*. But as to such *Deists* who believe in the same God that the Christians do, and yet deny those Revelations of himself which they say he has made, I know no Writers that come up to this Character.

Deist. No! What think you of *Hobbes*, *Spinoza*, *Blount*, *T—— T——*, and many others now living, who shall be nameless, for a Reason I know?

Scep. These are all profest Christians.

Deist. How come you to think so?

Scep. Because they plainly declare so in their Writings, as I can easily prove to you from abundance of Passages.

Deist. Pugh, that's nothing; they were obliged to such Pretences, because they liv'd under Christian Magistrates: This was done to save their Bacon; every Body understands their Meaning.

Scep. Don't they mean what they say then, in such full and express Words? Then they impose upon Mankind; they are Tricksters and Cheats, and are not to be believed in any thing else they say: And I had thought, that if a *Deist*, who took upon him to undeceive the People, had any Principle at all, it was that of *Truth* and *Sincerity*.

Deist.

Deist. They must have a regard to the safety of their Machine; for you know when that's dissolv'd, the Play is at an end.

Scep. It seems they are *Atheists* at last, and have no Religion at all: They believe nothing of a future State.

Deist. Yes, yes, we do believe something of a future State. But we'll talk of that another time.

Scep. Come, come, away with all your Principles and Schemes, and mind none of your Priests that set up for Preachers of *Natural Religion*; for their Doctrines are as false and inconsistent as those of *Popery*.

Deist. 'Tis true indeed, our Guides are in the wrong too sometimes, as well as others; but without some new Hypothesis of our own, how shall we do to answer the Proofs that are brought every day for the *Christian Religion*?

Scep. How shall ye answer them! why, not at all: Talk to those that urge you with them of the narrowness of humane Faculties; the obscurity of Nature; the uncertainty of Tradition; the strong Inclinations of Men to Superstition, and the like.

Deist. This, they say, is beating the Air, lying hid in Generals, &c. and is to be deemed in Dispute, as a giving up of the Cause.

Scep. Make Objections to some of the Christian Doctrines: Look out for Difficulties in Scripture, and bid them explain them.

Deist. I have used this way, but it won't do: For my Adversaries being better versed in the Notions and Language of their Religion than I am, and being furnished by their Teachers with some sort of Answer or other to every thing that is objected, I have not always Skill enough to know when they talk to the purpose, and when not.

Scep. Can't you say, that all the Books of Scripture were written at one time, by some body or other; and being publish'd some time or other, a parcel of cunning

Fellows in Power got them believ'd, upon a pretence that they were found in some extraordinary manner.

Deist. This will never do neither: For whatever time you fix for the writing and publication of the Scriptures, whoever believes these Books to be true, must consequently own, that there were abundance of Christians in the World, who believed all that's written in them before they were published. There are so many scurvy Dates of time, Names of Persons, and other remarkable Circumstances contain'd in these Writings, that 'tis impossible to fix the Rise of Christianity at any other time than what is commonly assign'd for it.

Scep. Insist upon the difficulty of knowing what is to be reckoned true Scripture, and what not; and of distinguishing between *false Gospels* and *true* ones, *false Epistles* and *true*.

Deist. That will stand us in little stead; because all the ancient Writings, which are said to be forged, as well as all the other which are taken for genuine, do own the whole Christian Scheme, and all the wonderful Facts recorded in Scripture; and the Authors of these Forgeries, bearing Testimony to the Truth of the present Scriptures, the Christians bring this as an Argument against us.

Scep. Urge the *Corruption of the Text*, which is called Authentick.

Deist. To that they readily answer, that take what Reading you please, the Foundations of Christianity stand good still, and nothing material is endanger'd by the Changes that have happen'd in transcribing the Originals.

Scep. Talk against *Inspiration*; and ask them if *Paul* was directed by the Spirit to send for his Cloak and Parchments.

Deist. What will this signify? If I should prove that all the Words of Scripture were not dictated by the *Spirit*, yet if some were; or supposing none of them

them were, yet if these Books have the same Characters of Truth belonging to them that any other ancient Books have, what shall we get by that?

Scep. Run them down upon the Subject of *Mysteries*.

Deist. That my own Principles won't suffer me to do: For I can't acknowledge a God without owning at the same time, that neither his Nature nor his Ways are to be fully comprehended. I have battel'd them upon their *Trinity of Gods*; but the most sensible Men among them reject all Accounts or Interpretations that look that way, and openly profess to believe nothing of *Scripture* in such a Sense as implies a contradiction to *common Reason*. So when I have urged the Barbarity of that Doctrine of damning poor innocent Children for the fault of their first Parents, they have told me that they find no such thing in their *Bible*. And in short, to all Objections of this kind, they say, that they are not to answer for the extravagant Opinions of particular Men; that 'tis natural for Men to be fond of new Notions, and to be proud of their own Inventions, &c. But they are sure that the Scriptures are the *Word of God*; and that the History of them is true, and every one must read and judge fairly and impartially for himself.

Scep. Well then, if they drive you to that Point again, never enter the Lists with them: For if you allow, that Christianity began at the time they set for it; and grant that such strange things as are now recorded in Scripture, were then pretended to be done in the face of the World; urge the Impossibility of the Facts as much as you will, it will appear much more improbable that they should ever be believed, being False, than that they should be really True. The more difficult it now seems to us to conceive that they were true, when we have no means left of disproving them, the more difficult it

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must be for us to imagine that they should have been believed formerly, if they had been False, at a time when every Body was capable of knowing whether they were True or not.

Deist. What must I do then? If we grant the Facts, we grant all. Allowing the *Facts* to be true, the *Doctrines* are establish'd on course.

Scep. Why, you must banter it off, and never enter into a serious Dispute with them: But when they talk to you of Miracles, and Inspiration, or the like, cry, *All sham; all sham; Stories for Children; une sottise, une Resvery, &c.* And now and then fling in an Objection or two, with an Air of Contempt, and never stay for an Answer.

Deist. The truth on't is, I have often found, that Jestings did us more service than Arguing. But since we *Deists* profess to own some Principles in common with the Christians about Natural Religion, we cannot so fairly decline answering such Arguments as they draw from them. The method of Jestings, and putting odd Questions, &c. better becomes a *Sceptick* than a *Deist*.

Scep. 'Tis all in all: Here you may Intrench and be safe, let never so many Reasons be discharg'd at you: And whensoever your Enemies are superior to you, either in Numbers, Courage, or Military Skill, you immediately retreat to your Lines, and defy them.

Deist. 'Tis wonderful indeed, to see what Influence this sort of Wit hath: There's no doing without prophane Jest, and ridiculous Allusions to Scripture: We should have no Plays; no Raillery; no fine Conversation; nor any thing that's agreeable or diverting without them.

Scep. No; there's no Subject so Entertaining as this; no sort of Wit that has so high a Relish: Obscenity does pretty well; but, as an Ingenious Author has lately observ'd,

*Tale of a
Tub.*

serv'd, it's so beaten and so exhausted a Topick, that it will never do alone; unless the Scene be now and then relieved with Prophaneness, it goes but heavily off.

Deist. I wonder what they do for Wit in Popish Countries, where Gentlemen are not allow'd Bibles; playing upon their Legends is but insipid; the credit of the *Popish Saints* being now but little better than that of the *Heathen Gods*.

Scep. There is indeed a great Pleasure in alluding to Scripture; and I have often wonder'd how there comes to be so much Wit in these Allusions. When a Parson quotes a Text, it is so dull methinks; and when an honest prophane Fellow does it, there is such a grateful Poignancy in it. If I were disposed to turn *Christian*, this would be one great Obstruction, that I should lose the best Fund of Conversation I have; and I know a great many pleasant Fellows of my Acquaintance, that would be quite broke for Wits too, if this Subject were taken from them.

Deist. But, next to Burlesquing the Scripture, the most agreeable piece of Raillery, is to play upon the *Priests*.

Scep. 'Tis oftentimes better Jestings upon them, than Disputing with them; for some of them are shrewd Fellows, and read a great deal more than most of us Gentlemen do, and we must have a care of going out of our depth with them.

Deist. Nay, that's certain, a Man may catch a Tartar sometimes. I remember once I met with a Parson in a Coffee-house, whose slovenly Habit and rough Countenance invited me to droll upon him: And after I had banter'd him for some time about his *Heaven* and his *Hell*, and the Laugh went on my side; he ask'd me very gravely, whether I believ'd in God: And when I told him Yes, he replied; " Sir, If there be a God, he is not to be banter'd,
" nor

“ nor is the truth of a future Judgment to be decided by a Laugh: If you will please to meet me
 “ any where alone, we’ll discourse this Matter together with a seriousness that becomes the Subject; and if you can convince me, that there’s no
 “ Future State, I’ll lay by my Gown, and hang myself in my Girdle, as being then fully satisfy’d,
 “ that there’s nothing in this World worth the living for: But if I prove to you, that there is a
 “ *Judgment to come*, you shall promise me to live a
 “ very sober virtuous Life.

Scep. Well; what, did you meet him?

Deist. No, I thank you: If we had been alone, we must have had nothing but dry disputing, and then I had been put out of my Play: Besides, he told me we should write down every thing we said, and some sensible *Jew*, or *Turk* should judge where the Truth lay between us, and who had the better of the Argument: And I did not care for being an Author, lest I should have prejudic’d the Cause as much as you say our other Writers have done.

Scep. So far you was in the right on’t: But, to give you my Thoughts upon this Matter more freely than I have hitherto done; you would do best to keep your Opinions to your self, and never meddle with the Christians at all. For my own part, I have always observ’d a different Conduct toward them than any we have yet talk’d of.

Deist. How do you manage, pray?

Scep. My way is to behave civilly towards all *Believers*; and with some degree of Respect to the *Priests*. If any dispute happens in my Company, I endeavour to keep my Friends in good order; I reprove them for rude Language; I tell them of the indecency of ridiculing what others profess to be sincerely persuaded of: If the *Christian* puts his Argument weakly, I help him out, and set it in a stronger Light: If I am tax’d for Unbelief my self,
 I ap-

I appear concern'd that my Character should be mistaken, and complain of my Misfortune, that I should suffer in the Opinion of honest Gentlemen: If I am prest home, I own that I have had some Scruples, that there are some things in the Christian Religion, as they are commonly explain'd to us, which I cannot so easily account for; but perhaps it may be through my want of Apprehension, or the improper method used by those Authors I have met with; that I should be glad to have all my Doubts remov'd; and that I should be very ready to hear what any worthy Person had to say.

Deist. How's this! Didn't you advise me to put Objections?

Scep. Yes I did, as a safer way than making Schemes. And so do I sometimes; but then I do't with great Modesty, and submission to the Judgment of those I talk with; and tho' I can't agree with them, yet I tell them they have said more upon the Subject than I had heard before; and that I will consider of it.

Deist. But is not burlesquing Religion a darling Topick with you?

Scep. I confess it is; but then I know my Company, and never talk in this Strain, but when I am among honest Fellows that relish such things.

Deist. But how can you be civil to the *Parsons*?

Scep. Very easily: For they are, many of them, Men of very good Sense and Learning, and I like their Conversation. Then they are, generally, of a very plain undesigning Character, and not versed much in the way of the World; so they believe all one says to them in a civil manner: And, when I have persuaded them to think well of me, they will defend my Character like Dragons, and condemn those that censure me as Ill-natur'd and Uncharitable; but especially if I come to *Church*, and to the *Sacrament*, (which you know we must do sometimes for

for Places, and there's no great trouble in going oftner) then they'll say, that my keeping a Whore, being Drunk, &c. is all meer Scandal; and that I am a very honest worthy Gentleman: And a Man must keep up a tolerable Reputation in the World, only to live a little securely and easily; but to be sure, if he aims at any Advancement of himself.

Deist. Well, for all that, I can never be reconciled to these *Priests*; I hate them mortally.

Scep. And I pray why so? you should not own that, because it will seem to proceed from a consciousness of false Grounds and weak Proofs of your side. Your Imposing, Wonder-working, Cheating Priests; such as the *Church of Rome* makes use of to keep up their extravagant Power and Interest in the World, I abominate: But I think those that teach People the plain Rules of what you call *Natural Religion*, should be encourag'd, as useful Men in a Common-wealth.

Deist. Right, if they would teach them nothing else. But they tell them that *Morality* signifies nothing, except they believe in *Christ*, that he is the *Son of God*; that he came down from Heaven, &c.

Scep. Whether those things be true or false, I am of Opinion, that, except they were believed to be true, preaching *Morality* only would have very little Effect, unless People were firmly persuaded that there was a God; and that he had in some extraordinary manner appear'd to them, and given them Laws; and assur'd them that they should be extremely Happy or Miserable, according as they obey'd, or disobey'd him: Unless I say, Men were some way or other disposed to believe thus, what would any Rules or Precepts, stript of such an Authority, signify?

Deist. *Natural Religion* is, in the Judgment of the Wise and Learned, sufficient to all the Purposes of Mankind.

Scep.

Scep. That Point is not clear to me; but I should be glad to hear what the *Deists* account of *Natural Religion* is: For I must needs say, that at present, I take the *Christian Scheme of Morality*, to be the fullest, and best concerted of any that I ever saw. And I fancy things would go mighty well in the World, if all Mankind would but live up to the Rules there prescrib'd: But Flesh and Blood, I am afraid, can't do it; at least, I have no Confidence in my self. And besides what would it signify for one Man to try, unless all would agree to live alike?

Deist. Well, the next time we meet, I'll lay before you my Scheme of *Natural Religion*. I must have a Day on purpose to open it to you in all its Branches.

Scep. If it be an easy Scheme, you are sure of my good Inclinations to receive it: but you must make it very tight, and consistent too: For if it does not hold well together, I shall be apt to pick Holes in it, you know that.

Deist. I'll venture you. Next Week I am at your Service wherever you please to appoint.

Scep. Let it be in a Morning: for then I am generally a pretty moral Man, and better qualify'd for serious Reflexion, than in an Evening.

Deist. It shall be in the Morning: But shan't we meet in the mean time, and talk of something else besides *Religion*.

Scep. With all my Heart. To Morrow Night I'll meet you at the *Old Devil*, and bring some trusty Friends along with me.

Deist. 'Tis done: Religion will keep cold to a more convenient time.



DIALOGUE II.

Concerning *Natural Religion*.

Sceptick.



ELL met again. This is the time we appointed to talk about serious Matters; and I am come with my Head very cool, and well turn'd towards Morality.

Deist. I am glad I have so fair a Man to deal with: But I would not have you imagine that I have any strange Stoical Flights to propose to you.

Scep. I promise you Sir, I never suspected you for a *Stoic*; I rather took you to be of my Master *Horace's* Religion, *Epicuri de grege porcum*.

Deist. Why, *Epicurus's* Morality is not to be despis'd, tho' some of the Ancients have represented him under an odious Character, because he was a declar'd Enemy of all Superstition.

Scep. But not to enter into any Disputes about the old Philosophers. pray produce your new Scheme of Moral Doctrine, which I am apt to think is very different from any other that has been yet presented to the World.

Deist. That I shall, in as good Order as I can; for you must know, that we have no Systems yet
written

The Principles of DEISM, &c. 43

written after our manner. It is but lately that we have set up for a *Sect*, and have brought our Notions into some method and consistency: For Men were so entangled with old Prejudices and Prepossession, that it was impossible for them to get rid of them all at once: So that no body has yet given a clear and just Account of our Principles: And among *Deists* themselves, there is some Disagreement for want of it; which I hope to remedy in the view I shall now offer you of our whole Doctrine; which sometime or other perhaps I may be persuaded to communicate to the World.

Scep. I am all Attention: pray begin in what Order you think fit.

Deist. The great Commendation of our Religion is, that it is very Plain, and very Short; not so long as the *Ten Commandments*, which our Nurses taught us.

Scep. The fewer Principles you have, the easier they are learnt; and I hope, they are the easier kept too.

Deist. The first and main Principles of Deism are these two: *Follow Nature; and do no Man any Wrong.*

Scep. These are old Rules which I am pretty well acquainted with; but I expected to hear somewhat of *obeying God* in the first Place, since in our former Conversation you assured me that you was fully persuaded of the truth of his Being.

Deist. To obey God, and to follow Nature, is the same thing: For we have no other way of knowing what God hath commanded us to do, but by the Inclinations he hath given us: What they prompt and dispose us to, that we may be sure he orders. For he would never have planted such Inclinations in us, if he had not design'd that we should gratify them; it being utterly inconsistent with his Wisdom and Goodness to give us Appetites and Desires

for no other end, but that we should check and restrain them.

Scep. This is good palatable Doctrine, that relishes like wholesome Food; whereas, most other moral Prescriptions are like Physick, which is useful enough sometimes; but to be always taking it, is unnatural. Your other Principle too of *doing no Wrong*, if it be well qualify'd, has no great Hardship in it. But is all the Virtue and Religion you pretend to, compriz'd in these two Principles?

Deist. There are other Rules which we think it convenient for Men to observe; such as *To be true to one's Word*; *To do nothing that's Base and Mean*; *To be Civil and Courteous*; *To serve and oblige one's Friend*; and the like: But the main Foundations of all our Morality, are those two Principles before-mentioned, viz. *To follow Nature*, and *to do no Wrong*. A Man that keeps steadily to these Rules, will easily see what is fit to be done, with relation to all the subordinate Consequences of them.

Scep. Well, for my part, I am not for increasing the Task of Duty, but I would willingly know the full extent of my Liberty, and which are the forbidden Bounds that I am not to pass. And I am afraid, these two short Rules that you have given me, will not serve my turn: For I doubt very much whether the Liberty allow'd me by the first Rule, be so great; or the Restraint put upon me by the second, be so strict, as the general Expressions seem to import: But this will appear better upon Examination, And therefore if you please, we will consider first, In what Sense and to what Degree it is proper for us *to follow Nature*.

Deist. With all my Heart; this is a sure Rule, and an easy one; and I think it holds in all Cases.

Scep. Here I must crave leave to differ from you at first setting out: For tho' it were plain to me in the general, that I ought to *follow Nature*; yet,
when

when I come to apply this Rule to particular Instances, I find it no easy matter to determine what I am to do. For I perceive in my self several tendencies and Inclinations, all alike natural, and yet utterly inconsistent with one another: So that oftentimes, when I have a Mind to one thing, I have at the same time as great a Mind to the contrary. As for Example; There's an intimate Friend of mine who has a very fine Woman to his Wife, and I have a strong desire to be as well acquainted with her as he is; and yet I know, if I should succeed in such an Attempt, he is so foolish, as to take it for the greatest Unkindness and Affront in the World; and I dare say, he would droop and pine away, and never enjoy himself again; now this works upon my Nature another way, and makes it very uneasy to me to pursue my first Desire. What must I do in this Case? Which Nature must I follow?

Deist. You must not injure your Friend to be sure, that's a direct Breach of our second Rule: And *Adultery* we allow to be an injury, that is not to be suffer'd in a Society. Neither is the forbidding this any curb to the natural inclination at all, because there are Women enough unmarried, and those as handsom too as any Wives, where you may pick and chuse; and there's no need of breaking into Inclosures, when there's room enough in the common Road.

Scep. Then you allow *Fornication* to be lawful in your Religion.

Deist. There can be no harm in that, where Parties are agreed upon the Point.

Scep. No! if you go upon the Notion of Injury it may often so happen, that *Adultery* shall be no Injury, and *Fornication* prove a great one.

Deist. How do you make that out?

Scep. Why, may not a Husband be sometimes as willing as his Wife? And then if three Parties to a
Deed

Deed all consent, is not that the same thing as two, where two only are needful?

Deist. Oh! but there is something more in Adultery than barely deceiving the Husband: There may be an injury done to a Family, the Honour of which consists in a right Succession. Then the Estate may go to other Persons than those it was entail'd upon, and instead of the *Issue of his and her Body lawfully begotten*, a Foreigner may be thrown in that claims but of one side, and that not the principal in the Entail neither.

Scep. Pugh! that's all Notion and Fancy; *Heraldry* and *Entails* are no part of the *Law of Nature*. But what think you if the Breed be mended by the Bargain? Is not a golden Pippin grafted upon a Crab-Tree Stock to be prefer'd to the genuine Issue of the Crab itself? How many Families do you and I know where the Sons had (as *John Dryden* observes) been *Blockheads ever since the Conquest*, that have in this last Generation put in for the Prize of Wit, merely by this kind of Inoculation?

Deist. It may happen so in some Instances; but its necessary for upholding Society, to encourage *Marriage*; and this can never be done, without making the Wife matter of Propriety, which a Man is to keep to himself as much as his Land or Goods, or any thing that he calls his own.

Scep. Little did I think to hear a *Deist* turn Advocate for Marriage, when the *curst Confinement of One to One* is a standing Topick of Raillery among all your Friends.

Deist. That's very true: And I must confess, that formerly I have been of Opinion, that there should be an uncontrolled community of both Sexes; that Men and Women should be as free to like and leave one another as any other Creatures are: But I am now convinced, that the condition of Man differs so much from that of other Animals, that such a liberty

liberty as this would never do. For the *Women* are not able without the assistance of the *Men*, to take care of their Children, and provide for them till they can shift for themselves; and if it were not for Marriage, no Man would know which Children were his, and consequently there could be no proper care taken of them; and no Body would be induced to marry, but in hopes of keeping what he liked to himself. Upon which account there ought to be a general Prohibition to invade another Man's Property; tho' in some Cases perhaps it might be done without any seeming Injury: But what Right is violated, or what Injury done by keeping Company with a single Woman?

Scep. That is as it happens. Sometimes a much greater Wrong may be done this way, than in meddling with another Man's Property, as you call it.

Deist. How so, I pray?

Scep. I'll tell you. If Marriage be necessary; and every married Man has a Right to have his Wife to himself, it follows from hence, that there's the same Reason and Necessity, that all young Women, who are bred up to be Wives, should beforehand be educated with that Modesty and Sobriety, that their Husbands may safely depend upon them afterwards. And since such Notions as these prevail in the World, whether true or false, every single Woman must think it as great an Injury to be robb'd of her *Honour*, as a Man does to be robb'd of his *Estate*.

Deist. A young Woman's Honour is a foolish Notion, an airy Whim, not worth the mentioning.

Scep. Ay, but by losing her Honour, she oftentimes loses a Husband too that would maintain her handsomely: She loses likewise the Respect and Kindness of those of her own Sex with whom she was acquainted: Then the uneasiness of the Scandal she undergoes, and the despair of making her Fortune in Marriage, engage her in more ill Courses

Courses misbecoming her Sex; till at last she grows impudent and common, is leud for Bread, gets a
 • foul Distemper, and dies in a Garret.

Deist. What a sad and lamentable Account you have given of the poor Whores! I did not think you had had that mighty Compassion for them: For my part I have none; for who brought them to all this? Did they not follow their own Inclinations? Did any Body force them? (that I never allow) they need not have comply'd at first, if they did not know how to live afterwards.

Scep. You seem to insist much upon their not being forced: But is not the Injury the same, if a Person be wheedled and cajolled out of what he has, as if he were robb'd? Suppose a Sharper meets with a young Squire unacquainted with all the Arts of the Town, and under pretences of great Friendship fastens himself upon him, wins his Money either by false Dice, or greater Skill in Play, and works himself by degrees, so much into his Affection, as to prevail upon him to sign a Deed of Gift to him of 1000 *l.* a Year out of his Estate.

Deist. Such a Fellow as that is as great a Rogue as one that robs upon the Highway.

Scep. Why, the Squire was willing; he was never forc'd or hector'd into any thing. It is the same case with an innocent young Woman, who being virtuously disposed, and thinking no harm, is by long Art and Dissimulation, and great Pretences to Virtue and Friendship, brought to allow a Man a Freedom of Conversation; then by Promises of Marriage, and hopes of a good Estate, is drawn on to confidence and affection; till at last in some critical Juncture, she is carried farther than ever she intended or imagin'd. Is not this a downright cheating her out of what she valued highly, without any valuable consideration for it?

Deist. I must needs own, that a Man who corrupts

rupts a Woman first, may sometimes do her an Injury.

Scep. But you don't do her only an Injury, but you wrong her Parents too, and Relations, who all take themselves to be disgraced by her Misbehaviour. Besides, it may cost her Father double the Fortune he design'd to give her to make the matter up, and that you'll allow to be an Injury sure. Put the case your Footman should make free with your Daughter.

Deist. My Footman touch my Daughter! If the dearest Friend I had in the World should do it, I'd cut his Throat.

Scep. Look you there: What, for no Injury at all, when a Man had your Daughter's free Consent?

Deist. I don't care for that: What are there no Women in the World to makes Whores of besides my Daughter?

Scep. Yes, no doubt but there are: But they are all Daughters to some Body or other; and I can't tell but their Fathers, or Brothers, or Uncles, may be disposed to cut one's Throat as well as you: I am sure they have the same Reason to do it.

Deist. I don't know how these foolish Notions come to stick so with me: But methinks I would not have my Children take the same liberty that other People's do, and that I have taken my self.

Scep. Well, but not to pursue this Subject any farther, where I find your Rule of following Nature very much restrain'd by absurd Notions of unequal Justice: What think you of other sensual Indulgences where no Body can be wronged? Such as were practis'd of old time in *Sodom*; and now, as well as formerly, at *Rome*; or such as Sir *J. Denham* writes of, as practis'd *All in the Land of Essex*.

Deist. Oh unnatural! abominable! These are Crimes not to be talk'd of: None but a Popish Priest

whose Imagination is confin'd to speculative Sins, could ever make Cases of these things.

Scep. I own such Practices as these are shocking to me that have no gust that way. But I met with a Friend of yours the other day, one of your Sect, and a Man of very good Sense in other respects, that defended them; one that freely confessed he had a general Complaisance for all his Fellow-Creatures, and thought it as innocent to converse with one as with another: For his Rule was, that a Man might please himself which way he liked best. And I must acknowledge, that I had nothing to say against his general Principle, tho' I could not bear his Instances.

Deist. Oh fy: Talk no more on't, there's no room for *Scepticism* here. The case is so foul, it won't take any Colour or Varnish.

Scep. I should easily be disposed to quit all my Doubts in this case, had not a celebrated Author, in great Vogue among you, lately advanced this Doctrine; That "provided due care be taken to continue the *Race of Mankind*, there is no *Moral Turpitude* in any *unnatural Lusts* whatever.

Deist. What profligate Wretch dares talk thus? We disown him, we renounce him, we excommunicate him. If such things as these are allowed, it will be as impossible to defend *Natural Religion* as *Christianity*.

Scep. Have a care what you say; for what I tell you is directly and in plain terms asserted in the *Rights of the Church*. And for your farther Satisfaction, I'll give you the whole Passage*.

Deist.

* The desire of propagating their Species being by the divine Wisdom the most strongly implanted in Man, next to that of his own Preservation, abstaining from it must be such a Crime, as is exceeded only by refusing to preserve one's own Being; and on some Considerations greater; since

Deist. How! that's our *Bible*, our *Code*, our *Magna Charta*. That Book has done us mighty Service in bantering and exposing the *Christian Religion*: But such an unlucky Stroke as this may spoil all. It is indeed a very indiscreet Passage, and I can't imagine how it came there. I know the Gentleman concerned in that Performance; and I never heard any of 'em defend such kind of Doctrine as this: It must have been foisted in by the Secretary to the Club. He is a little too wicked for us, and is for precipitating Matters before they are ripe; before the Minds of People are duly prepared to receive them. But no more of this abominable Stuff, I beseech you.

Scep. Well then we'll pass to a more innocent Pleasure. What think you of the Joys of brisk Wine? There's no harm in a chearful Bottle, sure.

Deist. There I am for you. The Pleasures of eating and drinking are very natural; and I think them the most substantial Pleasures of Life.

Scep. But within the Bounds of *Temperance*, I hope.

Deist. Why, if a Man should go farther, there's no wrong done to any Body. If a Man should lay by his Reason for a while, and forget himself, it is no more than taking a Nap.

Scep. Ay, but you seem to have a regard for Society. Do you think these eating drinking Fellows the fittest to serve the Publick?

Deist. A Man must take care to be sober in the Council, and in the Parliament. And when he has

since this prevents the Existence of an immortal Soul; that only dissolves the Union between it and the Body; and both equally would, with a few Years difference only, put an end to the Race of Mankind; the only Reasons of the moral Turpitude of unnatural Lusts. *The Rights of the Christian Church asserted*, &c. p. 264.

any great Business to do, he must be more sparing in his Diet than at other times.

Scep. But if a Man has not got the Habit of Sobriety, he'll be hankering after a Bottle, when he should be employ'd about other Affairs. There are not many Instances (tho' some there are) of Men that could make their Business and their Pleasure consistent.

Deist. What if there were none? There are plodding Fellows enow to be found that love Business for Business sake; such as don't relish the Pleasures of Wit, and Wine, and fine Conversation; let them do the Drudgery of the World.

Scep. That's very hard indeed, that you can't enjoy the Pleasures ordained for you by Nature, except some People should be so odly made as to renounce them, to secure your Enjoyment.

Deist. Nature has order'd it very wisely, that all Men's Pleasures should not lie the same way.

Scep. Upon the upshot then I find, that your Rule of *following Nature*, is so cramp't and clogg'd and of such uncertain Direction that it is as good as no Rule at all. Let us now consider your other main Principle, of *doing no Wrong*.

Deist. *Justice* is the foundation of all *Society*: There's no living together without this Rule. And this I will be bound to maintain; that to be just and honest, and fair, and equal in our Dealings with one another, is to be truly religious.

Scep. These things sound very finely in the general; but when we come to particular Instances, we shall have you renounce them again, or distinguish them away.

Deist. A *Deist* may be allow'd to plead Frailty, as we see the best *Christians* do in some particular Cases: But then I will not defend the Practice; I'll own the Irregularity, and stand by my Principle.

Scep. You have not the same reason to plead Frailty

ty that a Christian has; because you make all your own Rules for your self; and to be sure you have that regard for your own Inclinations, as not to lay too heavy Burdens upon your self: Whereas, the Christian professes to obey a Master in all his Commands tho' never so many, and difficult, and contrary to his Inclinations. But to wave that Reflexion I dare engage I shall make you throw up every Principle you pretend to, and justify your acting contrary to it in all manner of Instances.

Deist. What, do you think I would defend *Murder*, and *Oppression*, *Stealing*, *Cheating*, and such like Villanies as those?

Scep. Ay marry do I.

Deist. I am sorry to find you have so vile an Opinion of me.

Scep. If I prove my Point, then I have no worse opinion of you than you have of your self: And if I do not I promise to think as worthily of you as you can desire or expect.

Deist. Well then, let's hear my Charge; and begin with *Murder*.

Scep. Or rather, if you please, *killing of Men*: For the Word *Murder* is by Custom grown so harsh a Sound, that Men are apt to startle at the Word, tho' not at the Thing: If therefore I can prove to you, that you allow Men to kill one another, that's sufficient to make good the Indictment.

Deist. How do you mean? one Man may kill another in his own Defence; or a Magistrate may put a Man to Death for Crimes against the State; or a Soldier may kill an Enemy in defence of his Country. These things I allow indeed, as all the World does; but I know of no other Cases where it is lawful to kill.

Scep. This is all Self-preservation. But are there no other Cases where you will grant *killing* to be *no Murder*? What think you of the King of *France*,
who

who has sacrific'd so many thousand Lives to his Glory? Is not this just and right, and every way agreeable to his princely Grandeur?

Deist. He is a barbarous Tyrant.

Scep. I know you *Deists* have no great Kindness for *Kings*: But you will find that all those Actions which you are pleased to term barbarous are set forth under different Characters by the best Wits of the Age. And if it had not been for Conquerors and Victories, we had lost some of the noblest Patterns of Writing now extant.

Deist. This is gross Flattery, fit for none but Poets and pensionary Historians.

Scep. Well, but as bad an Opinion as you have of these fighting Princes, supposing you could not tell how to live handsomly at Home, would not you accept of a Commission in the *French King's Army*?

Deist. A man that designs to serve his Country, must learn the Art of War somewhere or other.

Scep. Ay, but consider what you are to do before you are Master of your Trade: You must murder, burn, destroy, &c. without any regard to Places or Persons.

Deist. In an Army a Man must obey his superior Officers; there's no help for that.

Scep. I see then upon occasion you can kill Men to serve other People's Ambition or Interest; and why not for your own? Do you know of no Body at Home that you could get an Estate by, if he were dispatch'd out of the way.

Deist. You make my Blood chill to hear you talk so.

Scep. What, troubled with Qualms of Conscience! Frighted with Bug-bear Words! Can you without any scruple Burn a Town in *Germany*, and put all the Inhabitants to the Sword, only for a Captains Pay; nay, can you make a profession of Murdering
at

at the word of Command, and yet boggle at getting a good Estate by the death of but one single Person, when laying him aside, will make you easy in your Fortunes, and put you above the necessity of ever murthering any Body else?

Deist. But to kill a Man in cold Blood, treacherously, and without Resistance, that I can never bear.

Scep. Cold or hot Blood, fairly or not fairly, it is all one to the Person who is to be kill'd. But if you are so nice as to the manner of sending a Fellow out of the World, why don't you challenge your elder Brother to fight with you fairly? You make no scruple of *Duelling*, I hope?

Deist. No, Sir, if a Man affronts me, I shall demand the Satisfaction of a Gentleman; but my Brother never injur'd me in his Life.

Scep. Never injur'd you! What is keeping a good Estate from you no Injury? Besides, it would be more for the advantage of the Publick, that you should have the Estate than he; a sneaking, bookish, musty, virtuous Coxcomb.

Deist. That may be, but I don't know how to adjust this to the Rules of Honour agreed upon among Gentlemen. If a Man gives me the Lye, jostles me in the Streets, twirls my Hat, or the like, this is just cause of Challenge, but to fight a Man for no other Reason, but because he was born before me, is without any precedent.

Scep. The Rules of Honour in Duelling, are just like the Laws of Publick War: That is, You may Murder who you will, either singly, or in Troops, if you can but get a good Party in the World to vote it fair. But this is nothing at all to the Reason of the thing. For my part I take it to be full out as reasonable to murder a Man privately, as in the open Field; in his own House, as behind *Mountain-House*.

Deist. I protest you are so wicked, I can't keep you Company.

Scep. It is not I that am so wicked; but I am shewing you how wicked you ought to be by your own Principles. *Vratz* and *Boroski* understood the business of Fighting as well as you, and they thought it no Crime to shoot a Man in his Coach, without Warning. The one said he was a Gentleman and serv'd his Friend; and he knew that God had a regard for *Gentlemen*. The other took it to be a sufficient Warrant for what he did, that his Master bid him. And as good Reasons as these may no doubt be given for any other Murder whatsoever.

Deist. These were strange Fellows that came out of a barbarous Countrey.

Scep. I'll put you another case that happen'd lately in this *Polite* part of the World. Two Gentlemen of the Town had pretty Fortunes between them. Both together were enough for one, but divided, made two miserable. They were great Friends, and they settled what they had upon one another, in case of any Accident. One of them being Sick, the other, who was always with him, put such a Dose of *Opium* into his Drink, that he never waked more; by which means the sick Man was rid of an uneasy Life, and the Survivor was made to live comfortably. And what harm is there in all this?

Deist. I am startled to hear of such foul Practices.

Scep. Startled at this! Believe me, I was not at all shock'd, when a Gentleman own'd to me *A-broad*, that he had poison'd his Father.

Deist. Oh Inhuman, and Unnatural! No more of this kind for God's sake.

Scep. You cry out now before you know the Case: Why the old Man was done; Life was grown insipid, and troublesome to him; and he might have linger'd

linger'd out a great while longer and kept his Son out of an Estate which he could not enjoy himself. And what has a *Deist* to say against this? Is not this more reasonable in it self; and is not there less Injury done, than in murdering a great many Men for Pay; or in killing one's Friend in the vigour of his Youth, for placing a Word, or a Look wrong?

Deist. But every thing of this kind, has a horrible appearance to the World: and Men would be apt to push their Interest and Revenge too far, were such things as these allow'd, or conniv'd at.

Scep. Don't tell me of the *World*; I am to consult *Nature* and *Reason* only, without regarding the World. Besides, you know there are some Countries, where it was a general approv'd Custom for Children to kill their Parents at such an Age. Nay further, by your Principle of following Nature and Inclination, I can't see, why a Man that finds a pleasure in killing, should not pursue it as well as any other.

Deist. Find a pleasure in killing Men! there are no such Monsters in the World, sure.

Scep. What do you mean by Monsters? I believe you would be puzzled to give a Reason, why that may not be as natural a Pleasure as any other, tho' perhaps you don't find any thing in your Constitution leading that way.

Deist. If this be following Nature, I'll renounce my Principle, and turn *Christian*.

Scep. Have a care of resolving too hastily, for fear I should prove to you, that a Man may be as strongly inclin'd to murder, as to do any thing else which is known to be agreeable to him.

Deist. Which way can you prove that?

Scep. Do you think that *Wolves*, and *Bears*, and *Tygers*, have any such Inclinations in them?

Deist. There's no doubt on't?

Scep. And has not my Friend *Hobbs* asserted and maintain'd, that Men are of the same Savage Dispositions that those Beasts are?

Deist. I have no value for *Hobbs's* Opinion in this Matter: He happen'd to have a timorous Nature of his own, and so he represented every thing else more terrible than it was in it self.

Scep. But have not you your self observ'd, that the generality of Mankind are pleas'd with cruel Sports, where some Creature or other is to be kill'd, or at least miserably maul'd? Now, if they were not diverted this way, and restrain'd by Laws, they would very probably take more pleasure in worrying and destroying one another, than in Hunting and Baiting any other Creatures.

Deist. There is no reason to imagine so.

Scep. You see that plainly by arbitrary Princes, who above all Laws; Nine in Ten of them delight in Cruelty; and are Tyrants purely for their Diversion: as *Phalaris*, and *Dionysius* of Old, and the *Czars of Muscovy*, and *Emperors of Morocco* in our days.

Deist. Such an unlimited unaccountable Power does often tempt Men to an extravagant exercise of it. But private Men have no such Inclinations.

Scep. Yes but they have, only they are dampt and restrain'd by the fear of hanging. I knew a Man of your Sect, that look'd upon Killing and Slaying, as the greatest Pleasure in the World. Wrestling and Boxing serv'd his turn when he was a Boy. At Eighteen Duelling was his chief Recreation: So that when he was not engag'd in any Quarrels of his own, he would lay out to be any Body's Second that wanted one.

Deist. This was a strange quarrelsome Fellow indeed.

Scep.

Scep. When the War broke out, he immediately enter'd into the Service, and all the while the War lasted, he was very easy; but after a twelve Month's Peace, he grew unruly again, and would fain have been ridding the Nation of a great many useless good-for-nothing Fellows (as his usual Phrase for Killing was) only he could not bear such a silly sneaking Death as Hanging; and so he contented himself with beating Constables and Watchmen; kicking Drawers down Stairs; and such-like little Diversions.

Deist. If such abominable Liberties as these were suffered, there could be no such thing as *Government* or *Society*.

Scep. I told him so; but he said he did not care whether there were or not; Mankind might disband as soon as they pleas'd; he did not doubt but he should be able to make his Party good in a state of Nature; and if there were a new Shuffle, he should have a good chance to be King. And indeed he was a very strong lusty Fellow, of great Natural Courage.

Deist. For my part, I have no Notion of such an odd sort of Inclination as this?

Scep. I know you had rather be planting young Trees, than cutting down old Timber. But the Inclinations of Men are very different; and there's no reason to be given, why one Inclination may not be gratify'd as well as another. I take *Covetousness* to be as unnatural as Cruelty, Bestiality, or any thing else you can name; and I can't for my Life find where the pleasure of it lies: But would not you allow a Man to be covetous if he has a mind to it?

Deist. With all my Heart, provided he does not cheat me, or prey upon my Estate to satisfy his Appetite.

Scep. Then he may squeeze, or oppress any Body else it seems.

Deist. I don't say that neither: For care ought to be taken in a Society, that no Man rob, or cozen another.

Scep. What is it never lawful for a Man upon any occasion to make his Advantage of another? Have a care of being too General; I shall find out Cases where you will not be so strait-lac'd.

Deist. *Cheating*, and *Stealing*, are such base dishonourable Vices, that there are none of our way but scorn to be guilty of them.

Scep. You mean nothing by this now, but breaking up Houses, and picking of Pockets, and such-like things as a Man is to be hang'd or pillory'd for: That is, it is a base dishonourable thing to swing upon a Gallows, or to peep through a Pillory: But Head and Neck safe, and you'll go as far as any Man towards wronging your Neighbour.

Deist. This is only a general Charge, a *Doctor's-Commons Libel*, a *Chancery Declaration*. Let's hear how you make it good by Instances.

Scep. That I can do very easily: And in the first Place, what say you to the Duty of *Paying your Debts*? Does a *Deist* make any Conscience of that?

Deist. Gentlemen must live like Gentlemen: And those *Tradesmen* are such unconscionable Fellows in their Dealings; that I can't think there's much harm done if a Man dies in their Debt. Let them look to it who they trust.

Scep. But are there no *Tradesmen* think you of your Principles? And may not they make themselves amends for their bad Debts among *Deists*, by cheating good *Christians* that pay better?

Deist. They may make what Gain they can of their Goods, that's a certain Rule in Trade: And if People are such Fools as to buy too dear, they must be content to pay for their Folly.

Scep. A very fair way of Reprizals truly. But you don't confine the privilege of Cheating to the
Shops

Shops I hope. Suppose a *Gentleman* has a Horse to sell, may he not take all the same ways as a *Tradesman* does to overreach an ignorant Buyer?

Deist. In the matter of Horses indeed it's an allow'd Maxim among all your Gentlemen Jockeys of what Quality soever, that they may make the best of a faulty Jade, without any diminution to their Honour: But in all other Bargains with one another, they think themselves obliged to deal upon the square, and to pay even their Play-Debts to a Farthing.

Scep. Gentlemen then are to be true and just to one another, in every thing but Horses. Taking your Rule with this Restriction, what think you of having a young Gentleman of a large Estate committed to your trust? May not you take some share of it to your own use?

Deist. There's no Reason why a Man should have the trouble of looking after a young perverse Rake, or Booby, for nothing; if he finds a good Estate when he comes to Age, what matter is it who spent it in the mean time, he or I?

Scep. Very well! and what difference is there between this and *robbing upon the Highway*?

Deist. Those Rogues upon the Highway do things with Force and Violence: They put a Man into a bodily Fright, and make it dangerous to travel upon one's lawful Occasions.

Scep. There needs be no Fright in the case. If a Man upon a *Black Mare* flings his Purse into a Coach, and stands to the Courtesy of the Travellers what they will put into it, what great harm is there done? For my part, I look upon this as the fairest way of taking away one's Money, and the most becoming a Gentleman of any: All sorts of *Cheating* and *Tricking* being as much below a Gentleman as *Begging* or *Working*: And what would you have a Gentleman do that is reduced to Want?

Deist.

Deist. Cheating I grant you is a very ungentlemanly Practice; but there are a great many ways whereby a Man may serve himself of other Men, without doing any thing that comes under that Name: As making some small Presents of Money to Country Burgesſes, to elect him Member of Parliament; receiving the like Favours in the Houſe, from thoſe without Doors, for promoting their Buſineſs there; getting a Place at Court by ſecret Services, and taking all the Perquiſites any way belonging to it; obliging People with courteous Promiſes of ſerving them, and making proper Advantages of their Expectations, with many the like methods. Now this is making a Man's Fortune, pushing his Interest, raising his Family; there's nothing of dirty couzening or cheating in it; here's no *forging of Wills*, or giving *false Mortgages*, or any thing of that nature, which is downright Roguery indeed.

Scep. I don't ſee why a Man may not do the one as well as the other; only that you Gentlemen have agreed together to call theſe things by different Names, and to fix the different Characters of baſe and honourable upon them. Upon this account it is that all Sins don't become all Men alike, tho' they are all equally juſtifiable; but forging of Wills and Bonds becomes a *Countrey-Attorney*, as well as thoſe other ways of cheating become a *Man of Quality*.

Deiſt. Who ſhould make the *Laws of Honour*, but Gentlemen and Perſons of Quality?

Scep. Yes, yes, and the *Laws of Juſtice* too, and of *Virtue and Vice*: That's it which I would prove upon you, that you *Deiſts* have no *Religion* or *Morality* but what you make your ſelves; and what you are continually changing and varying as you ſee occaſion: For 'tis very plain by all your Diſcourſe, that you have no *certain fixt Rules* of living, and
that

that you are under no Ties or Obligations to do any thing but just what you have a Mind to.

Deist. How's this? Have not I acquainted you with the Rules we go by? And do not we follow them as strictly as any other Men follow their Rules?

Scep. You follow your *Inclinations* indeed; you pursue such things as are agreeable to you, and you avoid such things as you don't like: But do you ever forbear any thing that pleases, or perform any thing that is troublesome, out of a Sense of Duty, as thinking your selves oblig'd to it in *Obedience to God*, or in hopes of some future *Recompence*; or for fear of some *Punishment* to be inflicted after this Life; or upon any other Principle but your *present Interest* or *Convenience* in this World? You say, that Murther, Adultery, and many other Actions, are Crimes, which in some Cases at least, ought to be forborn even by *Deists*: But even in these very few Cases of your own making, what is there to check or restrain a Man from offending, when he finds it either for his Pleasure, or his Interest to commit those things which you call *Sins*?

Deist. Many things are in themselves so base, and scandalous, and inhumane, that the bare Consideration of the *Dignity of our Nature*, is sufficient to preserve us from them.

Scep. This is a pompous Phrase, which without Religion signifies nothing. *Human Nature*, if there be no future State, is the silliest, most irregular, most fantastical Nature in the Universe. The Use of *Reason* is ridiculous, and serves only to prove to us, that we are a parcel of poor miserable Wretches, who are continually tossed about by foolish Passions, and amused with vain Hopes and Designs. And *Speech*, which distinguishes us from the Beasts, as much as our Reason, serves us to no other end but to enable us to complain: If therefore with all our boasted Perfections, we must die like the Beasts, why should

we

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we not live like them too, and employ all that wonderful Sagacity, which you call Reason, in finding out the best ways we can of satisfying all our sensual Appetites, however it may prove to the prejudice or destruction of other Animals, tho' of our own kind?

Deist. Fye for Shame! What, defile your own Nest! Have you no greater regard for that noble Creature, *Man, Lord of the World?* Do you pay no more respect to the *Os sublime* and *Erectos Vultus?* What, do you reckon *Heroes* and *Philosophers, Wits* and *fine Thinkers*, to be of no higher an Order of Beings, than *Lions* and *Eagles?*

Scep. No indeed; neither better nor worse, except they were oblig'd to live by some other Rules than their own Fancy or Humour; and had some better Prospect than a Coffin and a Tomb-stone. *Alexander* and *Cæsar* were a couple of ravenous Beasts, or Beasts of Prey, that made great Havock in the World in their time: *Aristotle* and *Plato* were industrious Bees, that built Commonwealths like Honeycombs, to be pull'd down by stronger Animals: *Tiberius* and *Machiavel* were Foxes that laid Traps for other Mortals: And what is now become of these and many more, that were in ancient Days, *so proud, so valiant, and so wise?*

Huddl'd in the Dirt, the reas'ning Engines lie,

And there's an end of them, and all their great Designs.

Deist. An end of them! No, they live still in the Memory of Men. Their Names are recorded with Honour; and their great Actions are preserv'd in Books; and the Prospect of such Glory as this, was sufficient to excite them to the Performance of noble Actions.

Scep. The Desire of *Glory after Death* is a ridiculous

lous absurd Principle; and not half so rational as that of the *Blacks*, who think they shall go into their own Country again when they die, to what place soever they are carry'd Slaves: For they are entertained with the Prospect of feeling and enjoying something themselves; whereas those that court the favour of Posterity, have not so much as the Hopes of being pleas'd with their Success, should all their Wishes take effect

Deist. At this rate you'll say that the *Love of one's Country* is a ridiculous Principle too.

Scep. And so I shall, where a Man has not a certain and immediate Prospect of serving himself by what he does for his Country. This is all Trick and State-craft, the very Master-piece of all Policy, to inspire great Numbers of Men with such Notions as shall make them easy and contented to be in a low and mean Condition themselves, that a few of their Brethren may by that means be enabled to live greatly and happily.

Deist. Does not every Body share in the Happiness of that Society, of which he is a Member?

Scep. Pray what share have the Peasants of *France* in all the Glory and Happiness of their grand Monarch? And what do the Subjects of the *Czar* get by all his Battels? What Portion or degree of Satisfaction is allotted to those vast numbers of People that labour in the Mines, and in the Gallies? But waving all extraordinary Instances, the far greatest part of every Society are poor miserable Creatures that endure abundance of Trouble and Pains, and work Night and Day only to keep Body and Soul together, which had much better part, if they had any of them the Courage to cut the Knot: And no Reason can be given, why they should bear the Life they are in, but that they know no better, and are afraid of being worse.

Deist. There must be different Orders and Ranks

of Men in a Society, or else it could never subsist; and every Man must submit to the Condition he is born to.

Scep. That may perhaps be reasonable enough, if there was but any time conceivable when it would come to their turn that are poor and low to be rich and in high place, and to enjoy as much of the World as some of their Brethren now do: But what Reason is there for any Man to submit, and be willing to live wretchedly all his Life, merely for the sake of other People? For my part, I thought there was a great deal of good Sense in what a Tenant of mine told me when I was earnest with him for my Rent.

Deist. What did the Varlet say? He did not question your Right I hope to the Profits of your own Estate.

Scep. " Pray Sir (says he) how came you by
" such an Estate, when I have none? You go to
" London, and there you drink, and whore, and
" game, and as soon as your Money's gone, you
" come down into the Country and swear at your
" poor Tenants, who labour and toil to maintain
" you in your Extravagancies, when they can hard-
" ly get bread for themselves and their Families:
" I had a Book lent me the other day, which says
" we are all equal, and have every one of us as
" much *Right* to what we can get, as any Gentle-
" man of you all.

Deist. What are *Laws* made for, but to force such stubborn Fellows as these to do their Duty?

Scep. I threaten'd him with the Law, and urged Religion to him, because I knew he used to go to Church on Sundays. But his Answer was, that that was a mere Trick of the Gentlesfolks to make Religion and Laws, and to threaten poor Men with hanging and damning, only to make them their Slaves; that for his part he would be a Slave no longer,

longer, no that he would not; and that he would read the Book he had got to his Neighbours next Market-day, or day of Election for Parliament Men, and stir them up to join with him in bringing all things to a Level: That there was an old Parliament Colonel lived in his Parish, who had told him there was a Sect of *Levellers* in his Days, and he hoped to raise them again; for come what would come, he could never be worse than he was.

Deist. This was a notable shrewd Fellow; how did you deal with him?

Scep. I was forc'd to give him good words, and to promise him a better Bargain when his Lease was out: And I treated him with respect, and made him believe, that a Man of his Parts and Industry, if he behaved himself civilly, would certainly come to be a Gentleman in time.

Deist. The truth on't is, there is some colour in what the Fellow said: Any Man may have reason to take it ill that he has not the same advantages which his Neighbour has: But if all Men stood upon an equal Foot, every Body would be poor and miserable; and therefore there is a necessity of framing Laws, and executing them very strictly, to make People content with their Condition, and to contribute their endeavours to the Preservation of the Publick.

Scep. Well then: *Dignity of Nature, Glory, and Fame, and Love of one's Country*, have very little effect it seems upon the generality of Mankind, whose Souls are too gross to be moved with such Reflexions as these. Leaving therefore these Principles to Men of Quality, let's try what force *Laws* have, and whence their *Obligation* rises.

Deist. The *Laws of the Land* are sufficient for regulating our Conduct, without fetching Rules from *Heaven*.

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Scep. And do you think that every Man is obliged to obey the Laws of his Country?

Deist. Yes sure, or else there's an end of all Society.

Scep. It may be convenient perhaps: But that's not the thing; where's the *Authority*? Where's the *Power to oblige*? Why am I to submit my private Interest to that of the Publick? Whenever our *Governors* act against the *Publick Good*, you *Deists* I know, will absolve me from my Allegiance to them: And by the same Reason, you ought to grant, that when the *Publick* acts against my *private Good*, I am no longer oblig'd to stand by the Society; but am free to look after my own Concerns as I see fit.

Deist. *Governors* may be Arbitrary and Unjust; but *Laws* are the result of the Wisdom of a Nation, and made by our Fore-fathers for the benefit of their Posterity.

Scep. Why should not we be as wise as our Fore-fathers? But if we were not, what has my Father or Grandfather to do to make Laws for me? I am a Free-born Subject of the World, that am to be govern'd by my own Laws, as being best Judge of my own Affairs, and most concern'd to provide for my own Happiness.

Deist. What say you, if you have your self either in Person, or by your Representatives, given your consent to all the Laws of your Country? Are you not then obliged to conform to them?

Scep. Yes, so long as I have a mind to it, or find it convenient for me, and no longer. Don't I say in my Family, to day I will have things order'd so and so; I will dine at One, and go to Bed at Ten, &c. and these shall be standing Rules for my Family; and yet to Morrow I think fit to change my Mind, and give out contrary Laws. When my Fancy or Humour alters, or my Circumstances are changed, I have a Right to alter my way of Living
accord-

accordingly; and therefore am not to be bound up by any former Rules or Laws, tho' they were of my own making.

Deist. Ay, but *Rewards* and *Punishments* will cure the Irregularity of Fancy.

Scep. As to *Rewards*, human Laws are very sparing of them; all their force is owing to Rigour: But that makes no change at all in the Reason, or obligation of a Thing that I shall be hang'd if I do it, and may have leave to die in my Bed, if I don't; for the Men that make these Laws are as fallible and humourfome, and as much subject to Error and Passion as I am; and do often make a great many absurd, ridiculous and unreasonable Laws; and is it fit that I should obey them?

Deist. Yes, till they are repealed, you must submit, or else all things will be in confusion.

Scep. How many Laws are there here in *England* which you *Deists* think fit to dispense with? Are not *Duelling*, *Fornication*, *Drunkenness*, &c. forbid by our Laws, and Punishments annexed to the Breach of them?

Deist. Pugh! Those are small things, in which the Publick suffers little or nothing.

Scep. At this rate every Man is Judge what Laws are fit to be kept, and what not, and consequently every Man will find a Hole to creep out at wherever it is for his Pleasure or his Interest to be released: Whereas, If there be any Obligation in Laws, one Law must oblige as much as another; because they have all the same Sanction and Authority.

Deist. Some Laws are made *in terrorem* only; some, to restrain the Insolence of the Vulgar, and some to prevent a general practice which might be pernicious; whereas a few Transgressors do no harm.

Scep. If this be your Notion of Laws, it is very fit that every Man should understand his full Liberty

ty as well as you: For which end the fairest way would be, to print some such Declaration as this before the Statute-Book:

“ Whereas such and such Laws are made for the
 “ Security of the Publick; that they may be ob-
 “ serv’d without any undue Restraint upon the Li-
 “ berty of private Men; It is hereby declar’d, that
 “ they are intended to oblige Men only where they
 “ can conveniently keep them, without doing much
 “ Violence to their natural Inclinations; That Men
 “ of Quality and Estates are and ought to be al-
 “ lowed greater Exemptions than other Persons;
 “ That such of them as can pay their Debts with-
 “ out diminishing their Figure, should do it; and
 “ that they which cannot, should not beat, or o-
 “ therwise abuse their Creditors; That no Father
 “ should be so cruel as to hinder his Daughter from
 “ playing the Whore, if he finds her strongly dis-
 “ posed to it; That no Master should forbid any of
 “ his Servants being Drunk, except it be his Coach-
 “ man just before a Journey; That a Tradesman
 “ may allow his Prentices to cheat any Body but
 “ himself, to whom he is bound by Covenants to
 “ be Honest for a certain time; That a Gentleman
 “ may murder any Body that he thinks has affront-
 “ ed him, upon condition he does it openly and
 “ fairly, &c. notwithstanding any Law, Statute,
 “ Decree, or Injunction to the contrary: Provided
 “ always that every one take due care that he be
 “ not found out to have committed any thing con-
 “ trary to the Statutes contained in the following
 “ Book, set out by Authority, so as to be convict-
 “ ed thereof by full and legal Evidence: Because,
 “ that in all such Cases, for Example sake the Law
 “ must take its course, and the Offender must bear
 “ his Misfortune patiently.

Deist. It is not fit that every Man should know
 what Natural Liberty he has, for then the Multi-
 tude

tude would be too strong for their Governors, and all the artificial Power of Societies would be render'd uselefs. If the Beasts knew their own Strength, they would never submit to all that Drudgery and Hardship which Men now put them to.

Scep. I have often wonder'd, why an Army of Forty Thousand Men being got together, they would chuse rather to fight for the pleasure and advantage of other Men for Six-pence a day apiece, when they might as easily plunder the whole Nation, and every Man of them be Rich: And I don't see but they have as good a Right to what they can get at Home, as in another Countrey.

Deist. It is because they cannot communicate their Design to one another, and agree upon the method of executing it time enough before they are discovered, and Discipline reaches them. Martial Law is very strict in its Commands, and quick in its Punishments.

Scep. So it is ordered indeed, both in *Armies* and *States*, that a few should be too hard for a great many, because some are wiser than some; and they have got the Trick of keeping People under by false Notions: By preaching up to them *Reverence to Laws*; *Love of one's Countrey*; *Care of Posterity*, and the like: By persuading them that some Men are by Nature *greater*, and of a superior Order and Dignity than others, to whom there are particular Respects and Submissions due from the rest of Mankind: And by making a Monster of a *Commonwealth*, as if it were a perpetual Creature, a *Common Mother* that took care of every Body; so that every Body should find his Account in serving her some time or other, when not the fortieth Part of a Nation gets any thing by all the Services that are done for the Society; the rest being poor despicable Wretches, mere Beasts of Burthen, made to do Drudgery for their Brethren; who, if it were not
for

for these Impositions, would every one have as good a Chance to be happy, as they.

Deist. Does not the *Common Reason of Mankind* agree upon the Necessity of observing some certain Laws and Rules of Living? And how is it possible for Men to form themselves into Societies and subsist together without them?

Scep. Now we are come to the Point. Every Man must *Act according to Reason*: For this is properly following Nature, which was your first Rule. Man is a reasonable Being; and therefore it must be as natural for Man to follow his *Reason* as for Beasts to be guided by *Instinct*. But what Reason must he follow, his own or other Mens?

Deist. Every Man must judge for himself, that's certain.

Scep. Every Man then must act according to his own Judgment, must he not?

Deist. There can be no doubt of that.

Scep. Then *Oliver* and *Massanello* were right honest Men; and are undeservedly loaded with Reproach, for taking upon them the Government of their Countries, when they judged themselves to be the fittest Persons for redressing the Grievances of their Times.

Deist. They broke thro' all Laws to establish their own Power and Interest.

Scep. Laws are out of the Dispute now, when we are deciding things according to common Reason, which is antecedent to, and above all Law. Did not *Oliver* govern as well, and do as great things for the Nation, as any of the Governors he turn'd out to make way for himself? Were there not various Changes of Government before him, all as illegal one as another? How came it to pass then that some obey'd the *Agitators*, some the *Major-Generals*, some the *Rump*, and some *Oliver*, and used all the Interest they had to keep such a particular

cular Form of Government on foot, in opposition to all others? Was it not because they lik'd one Sett of Men better than another; or because they had a better Prospect of making their Fortunes under one than another? Now *Oliver* wisely considering the great Distractions of the Kingdom, by reason of these many Changes, and the Custom that had long prevailed in this Nation, of having one person at a time to rule over them; and being fully perswaded of his own Abilities, to discharge such a Trust; he thought it most for the peace and advantage of the Nation, to take upon him to be *Protector*. And what if others should be of a different Opinion from him, and think him mistaken? Yet so long as he acted according to the best Light he had, I don't see what Right any Man has to condemn him.

Deist. There must be some common Rules which all Men are oblig'd to conform to; or else every thing will be in confusion: And there are a great many such, which the wisest and most reasonable Men in all Ages have approv'd and establish'd: And what the generality of the best and wisest of Men have thought reasonable, it would be Presumption and Perverseness in others to call in Question.

Scep. But where are these wise Men that are to be believed upon their own Word? And what is their Authority? Will you take all your Morality from *Aristotle* and *Plato*? Or from *Tully*, *Epictetus*, or *Plutarch*? Or shall *Montagne* and *St. Evremont* be the Standard Authors?

Deist. There's no Reason to believe any Man intirely upon his own Word; because no Man is infallible. The Men you have nam'd, were great Men in their Times, and have made a great many wise Reflexions, and laid down several good Rules: But a Man must use his own Discretion in chusing and applying them to himself.

Scep. That is what I say, and what I would prove upon you to be your Principle, and all the Principles you have; that every Man may live just as he sees fit himself, and take what Measures he himself pleases in the Management and Direction of his own Conduct, any thing before advanc'd or pretended to notwithstanding.

Deist. That does not follow: Because there are no such Rules laid down by any Moralist whatsoever, as will allow a Man such an uncontroul'd Liberty as this.

Scep. Pray, what difference is there between a Man's acting as he will himself, and chusing what Rules he will for himself to act by?

Deist. A great deal: For he that resolves to go by a Rule, whatever his Rule be, will find it very strait for him sometimes.

Scep. But if I jogg on easily in a broad pleasant Road, till I come to a narrow dirty Lane, where I am like to be stuck, what shall oblige me to go strait on, when there are a great many Gaps open for me into dry Grounds; or it is but breaking a Hedge, or leaping a Ditch, to get into better Way?

Deist. For such as these are the Laws made, that will not be govern'd by the plain Dictates of Reason, agreed upon by the wisest of Mankind.

Scep. Still harping upon your Laws! Why, I tell you, the Laws of the Land are of no more Obligation than the Laws of *Plato* or *Tully*; only that a Company of People have combin'd together to punish a Man that breaks them; and when those that are to be punish'd, are stronger than the Executioners, then the Law-makers are like to come by the worst on't.

Deist. What, do you make the Laws of a Country no more than the Orders of a Company of *Banditti*, or *Rapparees*?

Scep. Just such, and no other; since in either case there

there is no other Authority to inforce Obedience, but the Power of the Majority to compel those that are unwilling, and to punish those that transgress. People that robb in Troops, could never secure themselves, or their Booty, if they did not agree to help one another, to distribute fairly, and to refuse all Rewards for betraying one another. But if some of them had an Opportunity of cheating their Fellows, without their knowing it; or had a good Prospect of getting more by betraying them to the State, than by living with them, they were Fools if they did not; tho' if they were caught, they must be content to undergo the Punishment appointed by their Orders. And so it is in your greater Societies; If a Man could by Murther, Robbery, Fraud, or any other way, advance his Interest; or if he had a mind to break any other Laws, for his Diversion; he would be to blame, not to take the occasion, provided it could be done safely: But if he happen'd to be hang'd for venturing, it was only ill Luck, and he must submit quietly to what he could not help.

Deist. This is running all things into Confusion, and making the Condition of Men much worse than that of any other Creatures.

Scep. And so indeed it is; If you can provide no better for their Happiness than you do.

Deist. Well, since none of my Notions please you, pray propose some Scheme of your own which you think more rational.

Scep. To give you my Thoughts freely upon this Subject, without the least Prepossession; I must needs say, that in my present Opinion, the *Christian Morality* is more reasonable and more effectual to all the Purposes of Mankind, than any thing that is set up in its room, whether it were *revealed* to the World in that manner as is pretended, or not.

Deist. If you consider the *Morality* only of the

Christian Religion, it is, I confess, a good Collection of Precepts, and may be as useful to be consider'd, as any other System of that kind; tho' a great deal of it I take to be Impracticable, and not well adjusted to *human Nature*.

Scep. But, besides that this appears to be in it self, the fullest and most perfect System of Moral Rules for the Direction of Mankind; It is further pretended, that it came from God; whom you, as well as the Christians, look upon to be the Former of Mankind, and to be Infallible: And if so, he must be allow'd to have the best Right to prescribe to Men, and to know best what Rules are fit for them to observe.

Deist. If there were any such thing as *Divine Revelation*, you argue justly.

Scep. Then these Rules are inforc'd by such vast Rewards as cannot be refused; and such dreadful Punishments as cannot be either resisted, or endured.

Deist. Still you proceed upon a Supposition, That all these Moral Precepts delivered in the Scriptures, were revealed by God.

Scep. No but I don't: For revealed, or not revealed, if it were but thoroughly and heartily believ'd, that they came from God, they must needs make stronger Impressions upon Men's Minds than any other Laws or Rules possibly could, whatever Opinion they might have, either of the Wisdom of the Law-givers, or the reasonableness of the Laws themselves: Because it is impossible for any of us to have that Opinion of the Wisdom and Power of Men, as Christians have of the Wisdom and Power of God: Nor can there be such Objects of Hope and Fear propos'd by human Governors, as their *Heaven* and *Hell*.

Deist. The Christian Rules, are, I grant you, in the main, good Rules of Life; but it is not reckoned

oned sufficient to believe them to be good and useful, except likewise we expressly own, that they were revealed immediately by God.

Scep. This is it that gives them all their Authority and Effect: Otherwise, as good and useful as they are allow'd to be, every Man would be opposing his own Judgment, and would chuse and reject what he saw fit in his own conduct. But if you believe that God revealed them, you must take them all together, and endeavour to conform to them all alike, whatever Pride or Lust said to the contrary.

Deist. Perhaps it might be well to have such an Opinion as this prevail, with regard to the *Morality* of the Scriptures, if we were not required to believe all that is told us there about *Heaven* and *Hell*, and a *Resurrection*; which are things we have no notion of.

Scep. If these things were not firmly believed, the Laws and Precepts you talk of, tho' granted to come from God himself, would signify nothing: For Laws that are made to restrain the unruly Appetites and Inclinations of Men, without exceeding great Penalties annexed to the Breach of them, would never be kept, whatever Wisdom or Expedience there might otherwise seem to be in them.

Deist. There may be some Reason for that too. But besides all this, we cannot admit the *Christian Religion*, without believing also a great many strange Matters of Fact, which appear to us either Impossible or Absurd.

Scep. Without allowing these *Facts* to be true, there can be no sufficient inducement to any Man to believe that those Laws were really given by God: Because, whoever pretends to reveal things from *Heaven*, must convince Mankind that God sent him, by doing such Works as none but God could do; otherwise what he says will have no
more

more Weight or Authority in it, than if *Tully* or *Epicletus* had said it.

Deist. What turn'd *Christian* after all! this is going beyond me.

Scep. No, I am not yet turn'd: But if ever I could be fixt in any Opinion at all; if I could be certain only of this one thing, That there was a God; I should as certainly embrace Christianity: Because all other Pretences that come short of this, are either vain idle Speculations, or mere Covers and Excuses for Libertinism: And there's not a jot more of *Religion* in *Deism* than there is in *Atheism*.

Deist. How then! do you take me for an *Atheist* at last?

Scep. Neither better nor worse in good truth: For all the use you make of God, is either to furnish out an Hypothesis; or to avoid the odious imputation of *Atheism*; or in order to make your Approaches the better for attacking the *Christian Religion*. For in all the Discourse I have had with you about Morality and Religion, you have said nothing at all of the Obligation of obeying God, or knowing the Laws he has given you; or of believing a *Future State*.

Deist. Those things that are pernicious to human Society, such as Malice, Cruelty, Bestiality, and the like, I do believe, are displeasing to God: And that Persons who are guilty of such scandalous Things, as their own natural abhorrence of them tells them are Crimes that ought to be avoided, may, probably, suffer something hereafter, upon that account, by being confin'd to some worse Planet than this Earth; or some other way, as that Great, but merciful Being, God, shall see fit.

Scep. Very well, you own a God; but you'll have the making the Laws, and the Penalties for him. What you find no Inclination to in your self, that you are pleas'd to allow to be wicked and punishable,

nishable, and nothing else. This is like the extravagant Fellow that indulg'd himself in all kind of Riot and Debauchery; but, not having shaken off all remains of Religion, when he came to die, pray'd to God to lay Covetousness to his Charge: And so, if Prayer be any part of your Religion, you will desire to be indicted, at *the Day of Judgment*, for Burglary, and Sheep-stealing. But a covetous *Deist*, he takes care to provide Punishments for Extravagance and Excess: And in short, every Man, according to his particular Sins, has a different Scheme of what you call *Natural Religion*.

Deist. There are indeed different Sects in our Religion as well as others; this proceeds from the natural Infirmary of human Reason.

Scep. No, no; you *Deists* are all of one Sect: That is, all of you pretend to some Religion, and in reality have none at all.

Deist. That's a very hard Censure. Have not you seen many honourable, just and good Actions done by *Deists*?

Scep. I have so; but no Thanks to your Principles for it. There's no such thing as a thorough Atheist or Libertine in the World: Human Nature does not admit of Perfection in any thing; and there are no Characters to be met with exactly Good, or intirely Bad. The best Christian that ever lived, would depart sometimes from the Rules of his holy Profession: And so in like manner the most confirmed Atheist or Villain, would deviate sometimes into Virtue. The *Bonitas Naturæ* will now and then prevail, and the good Principles laid first in his Soul by his Mother or Master, will sometimes get uppermost, whatever pains he has taken with himself to discard them.

Deist. I protest you have got such a knack of disputing of all Sides, and of putting Matters into so many different Views, that there's no dealing with
you

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you. Come, let's hear the Conclusion of the whole Matter.

Scep. You must be alluding to *Scripture* tho' you believe nothing of it. But since you will have it in that Style, the Conclusion of the whole Matter is; That either you *must* fear God, and keep his *Commandments*; or you may do what seemeth you good in your own Eyes. One of these Principles every Man must have, if he will have any.

Deist. Which of them is yours then?

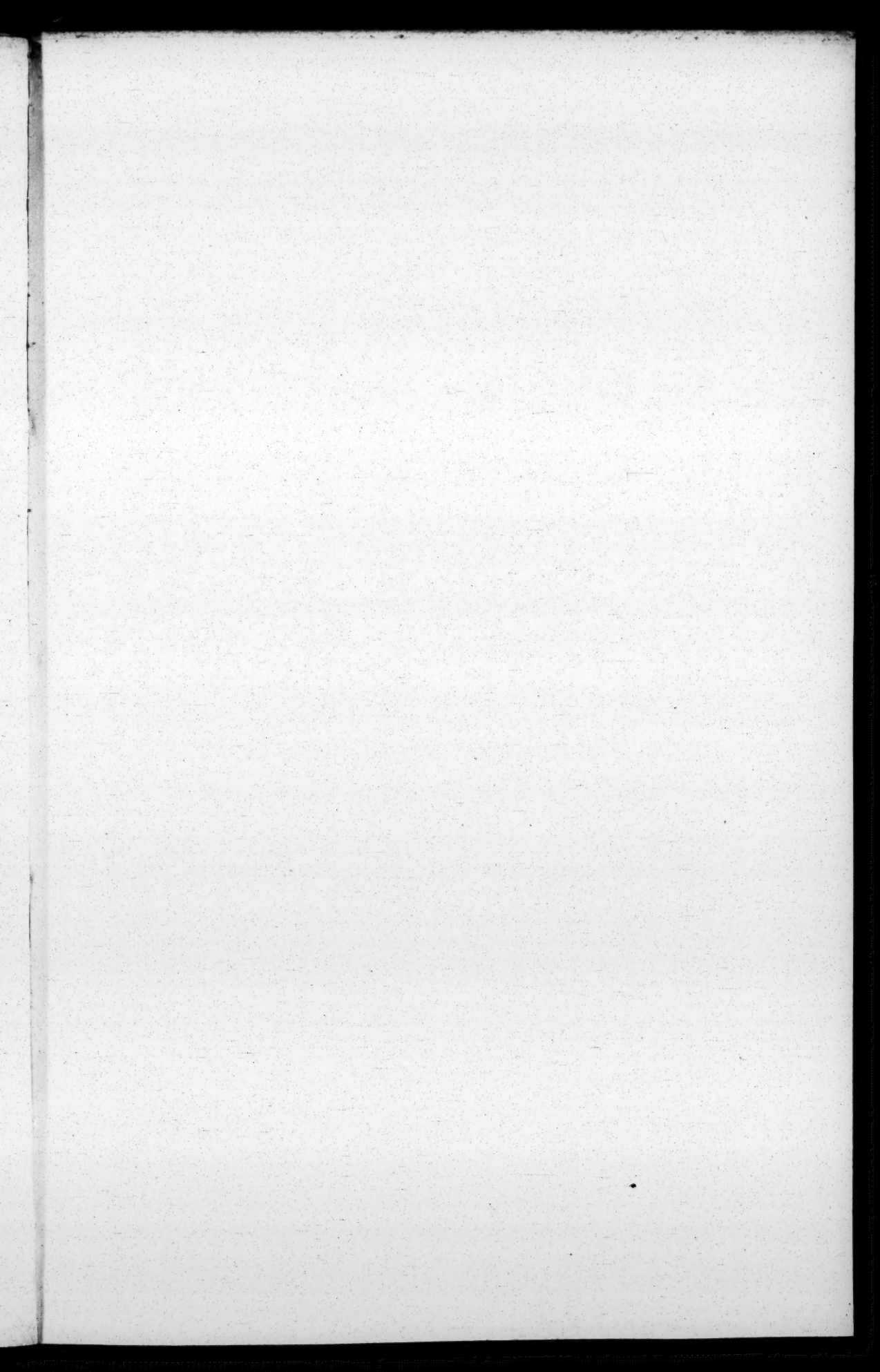
Scep. I am not determin'd, any further than if I were to have any fixt Principle to act by, it must be one of these. I was in hopes you would have fix'd me in the last; but I have almost disputed my self into the first. I begin to doubt, whether I shall not turn Christian at last; because I find already, that I am better pleas'd to doubt only of the truth of that Religion, than utterly to reject it; and the Thoughts that I may sometime or other be a good Christian while I live, and a happy Man after death, are agreeable to me. Then I find that my Taste of sensual Pleasure abates, and that of Reflexion increases upon me; and I have a strange Aversion to the Doctrine of *Annihilation*. I can't bear the Thoughts of being *Nothing*. I had rather, methinks, be a foolish little skipping Shade playing about the *Elysian Fields*, than to be eaten all up by Worms.

Deist. You begin to cant. Come, where shall we meet this Evening to take a Bottle?

Scep. I am now wound up to a serious pitch; and I'll immediately seek out one of the most sensible Christians I can, to talk with, and see whether he cannot give me a better Account of his Faith than you do of yours; and so fare you well.

F I N I S.





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